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# Factors Contributing to College Retention of Undergraduate Saudi Students Studying in the United States

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO COLLEGE RETENTION OF UNDERGRADUATE SAUDI STUDENTS  
STUDYING IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Abdulaziz Salem Aldossari

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in  
Urban Education

at

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2016

## ABSTRACT

### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO COLLEGE RETENTION OF UNDERGRADUATE SAUDI STUDENTS STUDYING IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Abdulaziz Salem Aldossari

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016  
Under the Supervision of Professor Javier Tapia

Over the years, attention has been paid to student attrition in universities. Delving from that, the retention rate has been studied by a multitude of researchers using a variety of predictor variables. As the number of Saudi students in the United States has recently increased, the need for studying these students' challenges and factors that limit their graduation rates has grown in importance. This study was conducted in order to explain the factors contributing to college retention of Saudi students studying in the U.S. The sample for this study focused on Saudi undergraduate students (senior students) in the school year 2015-16, studying in three different universities in the State of Wisconsin. This study first utilized a survey distributed to 45 students in order to see patterns or factors that may affect their retention in U.S. universities. Then, face-to-face interviews with a sub-sample of 10 students from the survey group provided rich information in regards to the factors influencing retention rates among these students. The survey results indicated that the personal and psychological scales had the two largest frequencies of occurrence, respectively. Conversely, the lowest score was registered for the financial scale. Face-to-face findings indicated that the participants' persistence to complete their bachelor's degree were due to such factors as personal and

psychological (e.g., parents' desire, goals and ambitions, educational value in gaining a better prospective career and social position, and self-efficacy and esteem), institutional (e.g., faculty interaction and university services and resources), social and academic integration (e.g., sense of belonging and peer support), cultural considerations (e.g., being open-minded to other cultures and finding a cultural ally), and financial influence (e.g., governmental and family support).

*Keywords:* retention, attrition, dropout, Saudi students, international students, academic services, financial support and retention, culture diversity, financial aid, academic achievement.

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To my father,  
my family,  
and especially my mother

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Attention has been paid to student attrition in universities in the United States. Graduation rates have subsequently improved over the years (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Student retention and academic achievement are key issues for universities and societies (Friedman & Mandel, 2009). While both terms, “retention” and “persistence” refer to the completion of a student’s degree, their exact meaning is more nuanced. The National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2003) defines persistence as a student measure, and retention as an institutional measure. Persistence is the term used by administrators and faculty in higher education to describe a student’s ability to finish degree requirements (Yorke & Longden, 2004). Retention refers to the university’s ability to retain the student until he/she completes their respective degree (Mitchell, 2011).

Student retention has been studied by a multitude of researchers using a variety of predictor variables (Astin, 1975; Daempfle, 2004; Porter & Stephen, 2003; Reason, 2009). These studies demarcate the factors into two distinct categories: factors associated with the institutional environment itself; and factors centered on individual student characteristics and their academic performance. Institutional variables include student and faculty relationships (Tinto, 1997), student engagement with the institution, financial aid and scholarships, and the effectiveness of college services (e.g., faculty advising and university services; Friedman & Mandel, 2009). Tinto (2006) states that institutional action, program implementation, and

student income assets have greatly contributed to the development of intervention programs leading to student retention.

Culp (1995) explained that collegiate services include admissions and registration, advising and course placement, assessment and testing, athletics, counseling, discipline, financial aid, orientation, job placement, student activities and campus life, and services for special needs students. According to him, departments and facilities should be focused on and committed to student learning and development and to creating campus environments that support all students irrespective of their educational goals. According to Hale (2004), university services should give greater deference to new students rather than upperclassmen because they are less familiar with the university. Beyond the transition to college, Tinto (1993) emphasizes that academic and social connections are the primary factors for student persistence. Positive experiences and interventions will increase persistence among students whereas negative experiences will weaken commitment to academic excellence and social integration (Tinto, 1993).

In addition to institutional factors, studies have investigated individual factors influencing retention and persistence, such as psychological factors and attitudes toward schools, academic performance, and student demographics (Bai & Pan, 2009). For example, Parker, Hogan, Eastabrook, Oke, and Wood (2006) examined the impacts on retention and suggested that student retention was highly correlated to their emotional and social competencies. In addition, academic and social integration are significant positive predictors of greater student retention (McKay & Estrella, 2008). This social integration also has the potential

to improve grade point average (GPA), self-esteem/self-image, and interpersonal skills (Astin, 1993).

Another factor to consider is that besides the influence of individual characteristics and circumstances on retention, students may transfer schools simply to pursue greater opportunities. Pitkethly and Prosser (2001) argue that this transfer can be a positive thing. Students may shift to a more desired goal, change field of study, and/or join the workforce.

### **Problem Statement**

The percentage of students who withdrew from traditional higher education in the United States has remained steady between 40-45% over the past 100 years (Tinto, 1982). Accordingly, students who withdraw before completing their degree incur negative consequences in the form of accrued debt. This becomes especially detrimental due to probable lower future earnings, as well as a potential loss of social standing (Baum & Payea, 2005).

Recently, there has been a dramatic increase of Saudi Arabian international college students seeking excellent academic programs and opportunities for higher education in the United States (Alamri, 2011; Heyn, 2013). The ministry of higher education in Saudi Arabia has recently published statistics stating that the total number of Saudi students studying in the United States for a bachelor's, master's and/or a doctoral degree was 97,592 students in 2013-14. Students who are seeking a bachelor's degree occupied the majority of this number with 53,145 students. However, the dropout rate for all these students and for all degrees was 16%

in that year. And the dropout rate at the bachelor level is 29 % (Higher Education Statistics Center, 2015). This figure of 29% merits attention to identify the factors that support the student completion at this degree level. In light of the significance of this statistic, this study explored the factors contributing to college completion of Saudi Arabian students in the United States.

Since retention factors could differ based on university and student characteristics, it is important to consider these factors on international students, as well (Byrd, 1991).

International students often face significant challenges while studying abroad due to differences in culture, language, and educational systems. Additional factors include financial and academic stress along with problems communicating in a second language (Trice, 2007). Byrd (1991) asserts that retention of international students also depends on the appropriateness of the services provided to meet their particular needs, such as immigration procedures, academic advising, and programs to integrate the students to American culture and its larger society.

According to Andrade (2006), few empirical studies have focused on the successes and/or failures of international students in American institutions of higher education. Similarly, Evans (2001) states that there has been a scarcity of information regarding international student retention. To address this situation, he conducted a study to examine persistence patterns of a cohort of international Polynesian students that had an unusually high attrition rate. His research recorded a departure rate of 71% for these students. The study revealed five factors for their early departure. These include the lack of preparation for a new culture and environment, preference to engage with friends and social groups rather than focusing on

academic studies, family circumstances at home, interest in studying abroad as a reason to leave home rather than earning a degree, and institutional factors, such as the need for on-campus employment and lack of knowledge about general education requirements.

For both international and general students in the United States, a number of models have been created to discover the reasons for withdrawing from universities (Pullins, 2011). Students' satisfaction can significantly influence their decisions both positively and negatively. Edwards and Waters (1982) studied first-year students' satisfaction with college and found grade point average was a significant indicator of dropout rate among the 155 students they examined. However, this study did not take into consideration students' racial and cultural backgrounds. Thus, it is important to study students' satisfaction based on the above factors plus others, such as residence status, gender, and socioeconomic background.

Failure to complete college has both societal and institutional implications (Rick, 1996). Institutional administrations and faculty must redefine their roles and their respective responsibilities in order to improve retention (Lau, 2003). In 1987, Tinto developed the *Model of Institutional Departure* handbook asserting that the student retention process is largely dependent on the student's institutional experiences. Evidently, students who are satisfied with institutional services and university policies are more likely to stay in school (Lau, 2003).

Ignoring the dropout phenomenon impacts negatively both on the student and on the institution. Departure of students leads to greater financial loss and a lower graduation rate for the school (both in economic terms and subsequent reputational fallout). A high dropout

reputation affects the support a university receives from stakeholders, lending institutions, legislators, and parents; which may result in negative unforeseen consequences (Nash, 1996).

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors contributing to college retention for undergraduate Saudi students studying in the United States. For the purposes of this study, retention is defined as the school's ability to keep a student from enrollment to graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005), whereas persistence is defined as a student ability to finish the intended degree (Yorke & Longden, 2004).

Even though Saudi Arabia has invested large amounts of money into the public educational system, particularly in post-secondary education, many students study abroad seeking a better quality education and more diverse majors. In spite of this financial support, the 29 percent dropout rate for these students remains unacceptably high (Alamri, 2011; Heyn, 2013). The case study design can be utilized to help identify the extra-curricular factors that most closely contribute to student retention in order to reduce the dropout rate of Saudi students in the U.S.

At the same time it is important for American institutions to improve the retention of these students and help them excel in their studies. The objective of this study is to explore Saudi students' experiences toward the factors assisting them in completing their bachelor's degree, as well as identifying the factors creating obstacles for their graduation in American universities.

## **The Need for the Study**

Researchers, noting the scarcity of studies on this topic, recognize the need to study the student's subjective response to their own experience (Tinto, 1993). This study provides additional information concerning the factors motivating Saudi students in the United States to complete their degrees as they adjust socially and academically to the collegiate environment. This investigation also sheds light on the specific institutional as well as societal issues leading to their persistence and retention. Understanding which factors contribute to the success of Saudi students in the United States helps students and institutions to better navigate the educational environment leading to higher completion rates for a bachelor's degree.

There exists scholarly consensus to the importance of school retention since dropout rate ignites widespread deleterious effects on students, institutions, and communities. Universities must work with their students to reduce the dropout rate. This study investigates the extent to which Saudi students are satisfied with their studies in the United States. The findings help administrators and faculty members prepare for the significant changes in an institution—its purposes as well as its activities—before absorbing large numbers of foreign nationals into their educational community.

Despite the fairly substantial amount of information concerning this topic, researchers have conducted a comparatively modest amount of research on this issue; particularly retention among Saudi students in America. This study augments the few Saudi governmental studies that exist. The goal is to provide students and school administrations with a framework for the academic and personal success of prospective students.

## **Research Questions**

To answer the following questions, a sample of Saudi students in the United States was collected:

- What factors contribute to undergraduate Saudi students' retention in American Universities?

The specific research sub-questions are:

1. How and which institutional factors and support services affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
2. How do academic advisors and faculty affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
3. How do GPA and percentage of credit hours completed affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
4. How does Saudi governmental aid affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
5. How does social integration in the U.S. affect Saudi students' retention?
6. How do cultural factor and linguistic factors affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. Universities?

## **Methodology**

The study examined various factors (institutional, social, financial, and individual) that lead Saudi students to completion or non-completion of their bachelor's degrees by asking them some questions regarding their experiences in U.S. Universities. I used a case study design drawing data from Saudi students in the larger Milwaukee area. Also, I used limited statistical analysis from the survey to guide the questions for the interview. A case study framework is a

research strategy that provides rich details and stories enabling the researcher to understand the dynamic present within single settings (Yin, 1994). Single case studies were used in order to present a relatively complete rendering of the story within the text (Yin 2013). Yin (2003) States that the researcher can recruit a large numbers of subjects in a research study using a single-subject design.

The researcher surveyed 45 Saudi students (senior standing) from three universities in the State of Wisconsin, specifically, from the City of Milwaukee. The purpose of this survey was to identify patterns of factors that facilitate and/or hinder completion of a bachelor's degree. These patterns were gleaned by looking at the students' responses percentages breakdown. Then, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with a smaller sub-sample of 10 students from the survey sample in order to get additional details from the students' responses. In order to increase rigor— member checking, external audit, triangulation, and thick description were used (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Attrition:* A reduction in numbers, usually as a result of resignation, retirement, or death (Canady, 2007).

*Dropout:* Refers to a person who has quit college or university before completing his/her degree (Martinez, 2003).

*Experience:* The conscious participation in, contact with, or observation of an event or occurrence. Experiences can be internal or external. For example, one of the internal experiences associated with dropping out of college might be that the participant was embarrassed that they had social problems, such as debt, and was ashamed to interact with their peers. An external experience associated with withdrawing from higher education might be obtaining a job or better opportunity (Dempsey, 2012).

*Retention:* Tinto (1993) defines retention as the continuation of a student's involvement in an academic endeavor until graduation.

*University:* Generally, a university is more substantial than a college in size, majors, and research facilities (Canady, 2007).

*Saudi Arabian International College Student:* An individual who has come from Saudi Arabia to a host country in order to obtain a college degree.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

While a large number of Saudi students have come to the United States since 2005, very little interest has been paid to these students' retention rates (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). In general, college student retention has been a long-standing concern for many administrators involved in higher education (Johnson, 2000). Factors contributing to college retention rates have been studied from a theoretical, policy, and/or institutional research perspective (Bean, 2005). Social scientists have studied these perspectives in order to formulate predictive models to increase student retention (Bean, 2005; Friedman & Mandel, 2009). This study investigates factors affecting undergraduate Saudi student retention in the United States.

In order to fully understand the context in which this study was conducted, the literature review first discusses general works on U.S. students and retention, including retention and attrition definitions, the historical context of retention, and the literature on factors affecting U.S. student retention. Then, the researcher discusses the literature on international students pertaining their retention and academic success. Since the study is on Saudi international students, I provide a review on Saudi students' experiences toward their study in the United States and what factors affect their academic success and retention.

## **General Literature on U.S. Students and Retention**

Before proceeding to factors affecting student's retention, it is important to define retention and provide a historical synopsis. Several terms are used interchangeably to explain the discontinuation of post-secondary education. The term "attrition" carries a more negative connotation, while "retention" conveys a more positive meaning (Titley & Titley, 1982). Guttman and Olkin (1989) define the attrition rate as "the proportion of students who leave the program" (p. 2). Alternatively, researchers define retention as the school's ability to keep a student from enrollment to graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Derby & Smith, 2004). Thus, attrition and dropout are opposites of retention.

Considerable attention has been paid to developing and testing theories as to why some students, whether international or domestic students, leave while others persist (Seidman, 2005). Historically, when researchers began to focus on student retention in the 1960s, they suggested that personal attributes of students were the primary reason for their departure from college. Students who quit were thought to be impatient, less efficient, and less motivated than students who remained in college (Tinto, 2006). In the 1970s, this perspective expanded with Spady's (1971) and Tinto's (1975) studies which included the impact of environmental factors (specifically institutionally-driven characteristics) on a student's decision to cut short their college career.

In this vein, Spady (1971) developed a model combining personal attributes of the student (values, skills, attitude, interests, etc.) along with environmental factors of the institution (faculty, peers, administrations, etc.). He found that there was a greater probability

of student continuation when the university offered accommodations that matched students' interests and needs. Tinto (1975) used this model to develop one of the most cited theories on student departure. He concluded that student commitment to earn a degree was linked to individual characteristics, and that institutional factors significantly affected a student's decisions to persist.

In the 1980's and 1990's, researchers expanded on Tinto's (1975) model to examine it from psychological, environmental, organizational and economic perspectives by considering all students rather than just traditional undergraduates (Seidman, 2005). The investigation of factors such as: economic variables (John, Paulson, & Starkey, 1996), student learning (Tinto, 2000), and cultural influences (Rendon, 1994) on student retention led researchers to devise new retention models.

By the end of the twentieth century, student retention had become a well-established area of study affecting both policy and practice. The interest of lawmakers for accountability and transparency in higher education led college leaders to turn to quantitative measures on student retention to demonstrate efficiency (Burke & Miassians, 2003; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006). The establishment of performance-based funding models for state resource allocation elevated interest on student retention as a primary factor in the decision-making process (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006).

Studies have investigated Institutional and individual factors influencing retention and persistence (Bai & Pan, 2009). First, these studies highlight the impact of institutional factors on student success. These include such variables as: (1) institutional size, (2) student/faculty

interaction, (3) selectivity, the difficulty for a student to get admitted thorough screening him/her with such criteria as average admissions test scores, (4) student engagement, (5) and the effectiveness of specific programs like orientation and counseling (Friedman & Mandel, 2009).

University counseling services are a vital component in higher education (Meadows, 2000), and, “assessment of counseling for academically at-risk students (typically in the form of a counseling program) has shown positive results for retaining students” (Sharkin, 2004, p. 101). Boyd et al. (1996) conducted a study to assess the efficacy of a summer retention program for students who were academically dismissed but applied for reinstatement. The counseling center invited these students to participate in a summer program focusing on academic skills. Boyd et al. (1996) compared students who participated in the program to those who did not, and they found that there were significantly higher persistence rates for the students who participated in the program for three of the four semesters in which data was analyzed. Additionally, the results showed that by the end of the fourth semester, 64 percent of participant students were still enrolled versus 49 percent for the other students (Boyd et al., 1996).

Communication between faculty and students increases the potential for student success and retention (McKay & Estrella, 2008). Beal and Noel (1980) state that the retention factor considered most important by college administrators is quite simply the “caring attitude of faculty and staff” (p. 19). According to Tinto’s (2006) study on retention, the importance for pedagogical practices among faculty members to engage students in their academic as well as social experiences is salient. Furthermore, Tinto (1997) argues that “if social integration is to

occur, it must occur in the classroom,” because the classroom functions as a gateway for student engagement (p. 599). And other studies have reached the conclusion that students who have more contact with peers and faculty demonstrate higher levels of achievement over the course of their stay in college (Endo & Harpel, 1982).

Tinto (1997) conducted a study of two groups. The first group included students taking Coordinated Studies Programs (CSP) at Seattle Central Community College. These students enrolled in several courses bounded by a unifying theme. The second group did not include CPS students. The students in CSP met for a total of 11 to 18 hours each week in four to six hour blocks over a period of two to four days. Generally, all instructors were present and actively participated in all class meetings. In addition to having a common curriculum, students had the opportunity to share their learning experiences. Tinto’s goal was to determine whether or not the program made a difference. His findings indicated that students in the CSP program had more positive views of their college, its students and faculty, its classes and climate, and their own collegiate involvement. The study found that there were five significant predictors of persistence among students at Seattle Central Community College: participation in the CSP; collegiate (GPA) grade point average; hours studied per week; perceptions of faculty; and involvement with other students.

In terms of financial support, studies have shown for many decades that low-income students are more prone to dropping out than middle or high income students (Kenamer, Katsinas, & Schumacker, 2010). Singell (2004) found that the provision of needs-based aid enhanced both enrollment and retention. Thus, for low-income students while non-economic

factors are significant as it relates to retention, those who are not able to afford college are statistically more likely to drop out.

Similarly, MacCallum (2008) examined the relationship between enrollment rate, retention, and success of students who received financial aid at California's community colleges. The results of his study showed that students' outcomes are contingent upon the type of financial aid services they receive. Additionally, prompt delivery resulted in higher student persistence. In other words, for low-income students quick delivery of financial aid to buy books and cover living expenses is a key element of their collegiate experience and success rate.

In addition to institutional factors, individual and psychological factors play vital roles in student retention and persistence (Edwards & Waters, 1982). According to House (2000), students' self-beliefs about their academic capacities and intellectual abilities are directly correlated with their academic performance. Gifford, Briceno-Perriott, and Mianzo (2006) found that college students with positive self-views accomplished higher first-year cumulative GPAs.

With relevance to individual and psychological factors, Tinto (1993) has focused on the social and academic integration of students and their effect on retention. Interaction with peers is correlated with many student outcomes, such as grade point average (GPA), self-esteem/self-image, and interpersonal skills (Astin, 1993). In this vein, Swenson Goguen, Hiester, and Nordstrom (2010) examined the effects of peer relationships on student achievement and persistence. The sample consisted of 271 first-year college students (173 females, 98 males) in

universities in the U.S. First-year undergraduates filled out a self-report survey to record the number and intimacy level of their friendships. Their regression analyses found that during both Fall and Spring semesters, GPAs were significantly associated from first to second year. However, the study did not find significant associations between the number of friendships among college students and GPA, but there was a positive and substantial causation between the quality of friends and academic achievement.

Scholars have found that students' academic, social and cultural integration in the university setting is a major determinant of student retention (Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 2006). According to Reay, David, and Ball (2001) "institutional habitus" is a significant variable that interacts with class, gender and race to influence college students' lives. Bourdieu defines "habitus" as the norms and practices of particular social classes or groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Based on this perspective, Thomas (2002) states that "institutional habitus" play a significant factor in student retention, arguing that "Educational institutions are able to determine what values, language and knowledge are regarded as legitimate, and therefore ascribe success and award qualifications on this basis" (p. 431). Therefore, educational institutions call for socialization and reinforce status, rather than fulfilling their main goal of pedagogy. This process ensures that the values of the dominant class are favored and individuals who are inculcated in the dominant culture are the most likely to succeed, while other students are marginalized (Thomas, 2002). Similarly, Bourdieu (1985) maintained that the dominance of "cultural capital" legitimizes the maintenance of the status and power of the controlling classes. As such, and building from Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990),

the “institutional habitus” influences student retention and dropout rates. If students feel that their cultural practices and tacit knowledge are inappropriate or undervalued, they might be more willing to withdraw from the school prematurely. The opposite occurs when schools’ environments accept diverse backgrounds and diversity which promotes higher levels of persistence (Thomas, 2002).

### **General Literature on International Students Retention and Graduation Rates**

Previous literature on international students studying in the U.S. has focused on the obstacles and challenges they face while adjusting to a foreign culture and university. In addition, some researchers have studied international students’ experiences while on U.S. collegiate and university campuses including their engagement, social interactions, and academic achievement (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Despite these studies, research remains limited on international student retention and persistence (Andrade, 2006). Evans (2001) emphasizes that this limitation is highlighted by the annual statistics compiled by the Institute of International Education (IIE) (the most reliable and comprehensive source on international student statistics in the United States) with requests from over 2,428 accredited colleges and universities. However, little to no information regarding international student retention is provided.

In terms of retention, Andrade (2006) conducted a qualitative study to examine the experiences of international students with low retention and graduation rates. The sample included 17 international students from Asia and the South Pacific who were enrolled as seniors

at a private, religiously-affiliated university. He took into consideration three areas of change: those that most students make when transitioning to college, those required by the religious environment of the institution, and those related to students' home cultures. His analysis of ethnographic interviews and focus groups revealed that— organizing academic responsibilities (e.g. time management), balancing work and social life, adjusting to the new academic environment, and self-efficacy were key factors contributing to international students' academic success.

Andrade (2008) extended his study regarding international students. He used the same sample as his 2006 study to examine factors affecting persistence beyond the first year. The new emerged themes included students' vision for the future, home and educational background, spirituality, validation, attitudes and abilities, and institutional engagement. Most students stated that support from peers, family, faculty, and staff were crucial for them to increase their academic achievement. Student's belief about the value of education and how it contributes to a better future was another important factor. The findings also indicated that students' attitudes (e.g. open-mindedness towards cultural differences and motivation), student academic abilities and skills, and time management were important to succeed academically. In addition, the findings concluded that institutional engagement was an important buttress for student persistence and retention. Students stated clearly that their assimilation within campus culture, involvement in spiritual life, engagement in courses, and involvement in extracurricular activities were substantial motivating factors for them to continue their education in their respective college/university.

Similarly, Kwai (2009) examined the factors that affect retention of undergraduate international students from fall 2006 to fall 2007 in two public four-year university systems in the Midwest. The sample of the survey consisted of 454 undergraduate international students. The results indicate that GPA, credit hours attempted, and on-campus employment had a positive effect on retention into the second year among international undergraduates. However, the study failed to correlate significance on language proficiency (using TOEFL score for pre-entry college), international student office services, living on campus, and gender with student retention. The researcher states that this failure was because most variables studied were either unclear or inconsistent. He hypothesizes that there are at least four possible reasons for this failure, which are: (1) "the nature of the on-campus versus off-campus experience of international undergraduates is different than that of domestic students (e.g. students may live with other international students and/or international families, which may provide some of the benefits of on campus housing for domestic students;" (2) "most salient variables affecting retention of international undergraduates were not included in the analysis," (3) "motivation to earn a U.S. degree;" and (4) "theories about the factors affecting retention of domestic students do not apply to international undergraduates" (p. 172-173).

Involvement and academic integration are necessary ingredients to student persistence (Tinto, 1997). Accordingly, Mamiseishvili (2011) conducted a study to observe the characteristics of international students in their first-year in college and examine the factors that influenced their persistence in U.S. postsecondary institutions. The result of logistic regression revealed that GPA, degree goals, and academic integration had significant positive effects on persistence of undergraduate international students. The author concluded that

academic and social integration were the most direct predictors for persistence. The study suggests that being “a part of” the university community is an important factor for first-year international students and the completion of their degrees.

In this vein, providing social support to international students is essential (Hyen, 2013). Yusoff and Othman (2011) emphasize that the role of social support on international students' adjustment is important because international students encounter many academic and cultural challenges when they come to the host country. A study conducted by Klineberg and Hull's (1979) found that social contact of international students with Americans was a significant factor in their academic success and persistence. They interpreted the results as indicating that international students were more prone to feelings of alienation from university life than students from the United States. Another study by Sumer, Poyrazli, and Grahame (2008) examined gender, age, race/ethnicity, social support, English proficiency, length of stay, and their relationships to depression and anxiety among international students. The results revealed that students with lower levels of social support as well as English proficiency experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression.

The lack of social support and integration increases the probability of homesickness among international students. Homesickness is usually considered a secondary part of “culture shock” which can induce feelings of alienation, anxiety, depression, homesickness, rejection and loss, hopelessness, and low self-esteem (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham, 2001). Based on that, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) examined group differences in perceived discrimination and homesickness in a sample of 439 college students (198 international and 241 U.S. students) from 2 campuses of the same university. The study also took into consideration the

relationships between homesickness, discrimination, age, English proficiency, and years of residence in the United States. The results indicate that international students experienced higher levels of discrimination and homesickness than U.S. citizens. Moreover, age, English proficiency, and perceived discrimination had significant effects on homesickness among the international students. Students who were homesick received lower scores on self-esteem measures as well as a degraded internal locus of control as compared with students who were not homesick. Younger students, students with lower levels of English proficiency, fewer years of residence, and students with higher levels of perceived discrimination had higher levels of homesickness which may increase the desire to return home. The study concluded that ethnicity was a predictive factor for homesickness (European students experienced lower levels of perceived discrimination than international students from other regions of the world).

Learning *a* new culture and learning *in a* new culture are crucial for international students' adjustment to university life (Andrade, 2006). According to Tas (2013), "Even though international students are subject to the same stresses of academic and personal life as their U.S. counterparts, these stresses are compounded by being in an unfamiliar culture and surrounded by challenges of communication and language" (p. 2). Yang, Teraoka, Eichenfield, and Audas (1994) studied 129 undergraduate and graduate Asian international students from Japan, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the People's Republic of China (mainland China) to determine barriers to meaningful relationships with US students, staff, and faculty at a large Midwestern University. The results indicate that cultural differences and not having enough time to form friendships were the most significant factors in the development of social relationships.

In terms of utilizing support services, some international students do not take advantage of the benefits provided by their universities which may negatively affect their persistence (Moore, 2008). For example, Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, and Lucas (2004) recruited a sample of 41 international students to examine their concerns as they sought counseling at a university counseling center during an academic year. The result showed that only about 2% of the international student body sought such services for that year. Approximately 38% of international students who attended an intake session and were referred to the counseling center did not return for their counseling session. Dadfar and Friedlander (1982) state that the lack in using counseling services may be due to some international students viewing it as an unreliable and unsuitable way to resolve their personal problems.

Utilizing counseling services could differ based on a student's needs and gender (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007). Regarding students' needs, Barrow, Cox, Sepich, and Spivak (1989) examined how the counseling service was used by international students. The results indicated that students' needs are predictor variables for utilizing the counseling services. The study suggests that multiple sources of information should be used to assess student's needs and that needs should be assessed continually. With respect to gender, Manese, Leong, and Sedlacek (1985) examined how undergraduate international students benefit from university support and counseling services. The study concluded that females had a greater need to benefit from these services than did males.

As a common finding, academic success and achievement are very important for international student's retention (Byrd, 1991). Boyer and Sedlacek (1987) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the effectiveness of non-cognitive variables in predicting college

grades and persistence for international students over eight semesters. The non-cognitive variables are: self-confidence, realistic self-appraisal (especially regarding academic abilities), community service, knowledge within a specific field, leadership experiences related to a specific cultural background, preference for long-range goals, understanding racism, and having a strong support person. The results showed that most of these variables were significant predictors of international student persistence. Self-confidence, and having a strong support person consistently predicted higher level of persistence and in turn, GPA. Understanding racism and community service were significant predictors of international student persistence, as well.

### **Literature on Saudi International Students Graduation and Retention Rates**

While a large number of works have been discussed in the literature on international education, little interest has been paid to Saudi international students. In general, Australia has generated a large amount of literature on students from East Asia and India because of the large number of students coming from these regions. Only a few studies have been found about Saudi international students in the United States, and most of these studies were quantitative and conducted more than twenty years ago (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). There are reasons for this scarcity in studying Saudi students studying overseas. According to Shaw (2010):

This lack of early research may be due to historical factors . . . Saudi Arabia was characterized by isolationism, and a significant percentage of its population was nomadic Bedouins . . . Oil money . . . dramatically changed Saudi Arabia's deeply

traditional society. The nation opened its doors to outside influence and began sending its students abroad a decade later. (p. 49)

Hence, the nature of the Saudi economy and society before the oil industry limited the country from developing its educational system and population attitudes towards education abroad (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). Abu-Sahlieh (2004) includes a reason that made Saudi students not to prefer studying overseas in the past. He emphasized that restrictive religious views discourage Saudi students from travelling to “the lands of the non-Islamic country”. The concern being that Saudi students could experience a whole different lifestyle that conflicts with their religion such as gender-mixing in classes, different (non Halal) food, etc. (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010).

The limited literature that exists are based on quantitative studies. Here the focus has been to test hypothesis associated with students’ academic difficulties, their attitudes toward their new academic environment, and their perception of the facilities and services offered by the prospective university (Basfar, 1995; Al-Jasir, 1993). These studies have reached the conclusion that Saudi international students see the English language as one of the most difficult adjustment areas. They also report that the students’ age, marital status, courses of study, and gender significantly affect their perceptions on the difficulty in adjusting to the English language (Shabeeb, 1996; Al-Shehry, 1989). Barriers preventing integration with local students and communities had an effect on Saudi international students’ ability to cope (Al-Shehry, 1989).

In terms of qualitative studies, Shaw (2010) states that there is a limited number of studies on Saudi international students’ experiences. Only five qualitative studies exist about

Saudi students' experiences consisting of two unpublished research projects (Shaw, 2010; Heyn, 2013) and three published research papers. The first paper by Midgley (2009) is about the experiences of male Saudi Arabian nursing students at an Australian university. The second study by Gauntlett (2006) reported on the academic expectations of Gulf-sponsored students in Australia. The third study conducted by Fallon and Bycroft (2009) focuses on education materials for Saudi Arabian home-stay students (students living with families instead of university housing) in Australia. All of these papers have focused on Saudi international students in Australian institutions. Whereas Shaw (2010) and Heyn (2013) have focused on Saudi international students' experiences in the United States.

The major findings of these five studies include: (1) Some Australian home-stay cases reported that some Saudi male students show a lack of respect for women (Fallon & Bycroft, 2009); (2) in term of responsibility, Saudi females depend on their husbands completely, which increase men's concern about their wives and that might have a negative impact upon their experience (Midgley, 2009); (3) Saudi sponsored students might need motivation to take responsibility for their studies compared to other international students (Gauntlett, 2006); (4) Saudi students in the United States spent more time in the following activities; study skills, study groups, taking advantage of campus resources, hard work, and persistence to increase their achievement and success (Shaw, 2010); (5) English language barriers, homesickness, social engagement, and prejudice and racism were the most challenges for Saudi students in the United States (Heyn, 2013).

These quantitative and qualitative studies have shown the challenges that Saudi students face when studying in the United States. Differences in the educational system

between Saudi Arabia and the United States are obstacles for Saudi students (Heyn, 2013). Al-Salloom (1995) clarifies that the distinct difference in Saudi education system centers in three areas: (a) Islam is at the core of the Saudi education system (e.g. “the curriculum may best be illustrated by the number of periods per week devoted to the study of [the] Qur’an, Islamic tradition, jurisprudence, and theology from the first level of kindergarten to the last level of higher education”) (p. 19); (b) segregation of female and male students; and (c) the provision of a free education including books and health services at all levels to all Saudi citizens and residents.

While Al-Salloom (as cited in Heyn, 2013) pays attention to educational differences, other researchers have given priority to Saudi students’ lives and personal factors that could influence their academic success and persistence to finish their degree. These factors include: (1) perceptions of academic achievement and university experience (Rasheed, 1972; Leong & Chou, 1996; Al-nusair, 2000; Shaw, 2010; Heyn, 2013), (2) adjustment factors (Jammaz, 1981; Mustafa, 1985; Al-Jasir, 1993; Shabeeb, 1996; Heyn, 2013), (3) values conflicts (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Alfauzan, 1992; Oweidat 1981; Heyn, 2013), and (4) other essential problems (Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Shehry, 1989; Shabeeb, 1996; Heyn, 2013).

- **Perceptions of Academic Achievement and University Experience:**

Saudi students studying abroad receive scholarships because they are often the most academically successful among their peers in their home country (Leong & Chou, 1996). Therefore, the self-perception of Saudi international students about their academic achievement are high in comparison to their counterparts in Saudi Arabia. In addition, their

families and the government have high expectations which may increase pressure for success or failure (Heyn, 2013).

Rasheed (1972) conducted a study of Saudi students studying in the United States on their experiences and goals. A survey was distributed to explore how the students felt on their universities goals and experiences in terms of academic and social development. The researcher found that the participants placed less emphasis on university academic goals the longer they stayed in the United States.

Similarly, Al-nusair (2000) studied Saudi students' perceptions on their college experiences, their satisfaction with college, and knowledge gained at American colleges and universities. The study used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) to determine the amount, scope, and quality of effort Saudi Arabian students devoted to the use of facilities and opportunities for learning and development. The results indicate that these students were less involved in writing activities experiences, art and music, theater, personal experiences, friends, clubs and organizations, and campus facilities. Conversely, the results showed that Saudi students were more involved than U.S. students in library experience, interaction with faculty, course learning, science, and conversations related to coursework. The analysis also revealed that there was a significant relationship between the efforts devoted to college activities and the self-reported educational gains of the Saudi students.

- **Adjustment Factor:**

Prior coming to the United States, Saudi students have an orientation program that prepares them for their lives and study in the United States. This program was developed

because previous studies had shown that international students are more prone to experience cultural shock (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008), having academic and social adjustment problems (Grayson, 2008), having different notions on intercultural sensitivity and competence (Gill, 2007; Volet, 2004), and lack of knowledge on their security and rights (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010).

Jammaz (1981) conducted a quantitative study to explore the adjustment problems of Saudi Arabian students in the United States. His study revealed that student's age, marital status, majors, jobs in home country, time in the United States, English skills in writing and reading play a significant role in student adjustment. In greater detail the findings show that:

- 1- Older students were better adjusted than their younger counterparts.
- 2- Single students were better adjusted than married students.
- 3- Students in humanities and social science fields were less well-adjusted than students in engineering and the natural science.
- 4- Students who had been employed in Saudi Arabia before coming to the United States were better adjusted than those who had not been employed.
- 5- The length of time Saudi Arabian students stayed in the United States seemed to have a low correlation with their level of adjustment.
- 6- Students with English deficiencies were less adjusted than those who were linguistically more efficient.

In a similar way, Heyn (2013) found that positive adjustment contributes to higher academic achievement and this may pertain to better linguistic and academic skills.

Accordingly, Mustafa (1985) studied the relationship between Saudi Arabian international students' academic problems and their adjustment. The study included 47 Saudi Arabian students, 22 faculty, 24 administrators at Western Michigan University, and 8 academic advisors from the Saudi Arabian Educational Mission in Chicago. He found that Saudi students' adjustment was correlated positively to academic skills and language. For example, due to English deficiencies, these students struggled with classroom discussions and with writing assignments. However, Mustafa's (1985) study contradicts Jammaz's (1981) study in that the length of time Saudi students spent in the United States did not correlate with their level of adjustment. Here, Mustafa found that longer periods in the U.S. led to higher levels of English fluency and adjustment.

In addition, Al-Jasir (1993) examined how social, cultural, and academic factors are associated with adjustment levels of Saudi Arabian students in the United States. The study analyzed a total of 218 questionnaires to predict the significance of adjustment levels. The results tend to support Mustafa's (1985) study. The results indicate that self-perceived language ability significantly contributed to satisfaction and personal growth. Therefore, language barriers are major obstacles that handicap Saudi Arabian students' adjustment to complete their degrees in the United States.

Shabeeb (1996) conducted a study to examine the factors that may affect both Saudi and other international students from the Arabian Gulf in the United States. The sample included 150 International Students (male and female), attending six colleges and universities in eastern Washington. The results show the adjustment problems of these international students from most severe to least difficult: (a) language barriers, (b) social-personal issues, (c) living-

dining problems, (d) grades, (e) orientation service, (f) admission, (g) placement service, (h) student activities, (i) religious service, (j) health service, and (k) financial aid.

- **Values Conflicts:**

Prior to coming to the United States, Saudi Arabian international students have different values from those who have been in the U.S. for a longer time (Heyn, 2013). Oweidat (1981) studied how the values of Saudi students change over their duration in the United States. He found that those students who had resided in the United States for at least three years had values similar to those held by Americans. Conversely, the students who had recently arrived in the United States demonstrated conservative views similar to those in Saudi Arabia. For example, Alfauzan (1992) examined how Saudi Arabian international students in the United States change their thinking about women's participation in Saudi Arabia's workforce. He found that Saudi students studying in the United States develop more liberal opinions than Saudi students studying in Saudi Arabia.

In a comparison between the values of Saudi graduates from American universities versus Saudi graduates from Saudi universities, Akhtarkhavari (1994), found that Saudi students from American universities held similar perceptions of sex role identity to those of Americans. Moreover, Saudi students earning their degrees from the United States demonstrated a positive perception about their education and values in the United States in which it helped them acquire new skills and become more understanding of other cultures.

- **Other Essential Problems:**

According to Heyn (2013), academic skills, cumulative grade point average (GPA), racism and prejudice, and weather conditions may affect Saudi student's ability to complete their degree or continue in the same major in the United States. Regarding to academic skills and GPA, Al-Harhi (1987) studied the reasons why Saudi Arabian undergraduate students change their majors when studying in the United States. The sample included 200 Saudi Arabian students (with different degrees of scholarships) and 30 academic advisors. The results concluded that these students changed to different majors due to an inadequate background in math and science, poor academic advising provided to the students, lack of supervision and monitoring progress, and ignoring students' needs and academic requests.

Similarly, Al-Ghamdi (1985) studied factors that may lead Saudi Arabian students to change their majors after they begin graduate programs. His study's goal was similar to Al-Harhi (1987), but his sample consisted of only graduate students. The results indicated two significant factors influencing students to change their majors. These were cumulative grade point average (GPA) and the compatibility of graduate major with the undergraduate major. Not surprising, students with higher cumulative grade point average (GPA) were less prone to leave or change their programs. Al-Shehry (1989) also surveyed 354 Saudi graduate students studying in the United States to find the reasons that lead them to change their majors or leave school. He found that the areas of the greatest concern to Saudi Arabian students were English fluency, academic records (grades, writing essays, and academic advising), and financial aid. It is notable that Al-Ghamdi's (1985) study also support Al-Shehry's (1989) study that cumulative grade point average affect student persistence in college.

Another problem that Saudi students in the United States face is climate related (Shabeeb, 1996). Heyn (2013) in his study about the challenges, needs, and lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international students in the United States found that a number of participants dislike the weather in the Midwestern region of the United States and miss the weather in Saudi Arabia.

All these quantitative and qualitative studies talk about the challenges and experiences that Saudi students face when studying in the United States. However, these studies did not include how these challenges and experiences increase or decrease Saudi students' retention rates. Therefore, more contemporary research is necessary to explore the factors promoting persistence among Saudi students studying abroad.

### **Literature Review Limitations**

The retention of first-generation Saudi students (students whose parents have not completed a college education) could prove more challenging than second or third-generation students. Thayer (2000) states that the persistence of first generation students is likely lower than their non-first generation counterparts. This literature review, however, does not take into account respective high school academic careers and parental educational attainment.

Additionally, the research is greatly handicapped by its inability to distinguish dropouts from transfers, which are two very different outcomes of a curtailed postsecondary education. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that transferring, while benefiting some students, has an overall negative impact on the likelihood of degree attainment.

## **Conclusion**

The aforementioned issues will become increasingly important as an evaluative component of college retention. This literature review has presented implications for special intervention programs and the application of counseling centers. Existing research has provided ample evidence that counseling services are particularly efficacious when it comes to achieving the overall educational mission of an institution. The literature review has also demonstrated that providing financial aid greatly impacts degree completion. Social integration, academic performance, access to financial aid, student interaction with faculty and peers, and superior GPA attainment; especially collectively, play a major role in student retention.

In terms of international students, review of the literature suggested that international students offices and academic advising should provide all the information needed to guide and direct international students concerning their academic matters. Moreover, the role of faculty is not absent in regard to student retention. Faculty must incorporate more cooperative learning activities to ensure academic integration of international students in which they can develop friendships with other students. Finally, higher levels of English fluency help international students with their adjustment. These English fluency and adjustment ensure international students' academic success and integration. They also encourage these students to interact with peers outside of the classroom.

## CHAPTER III

### The Social Context for Saudi University Students

#### **The Nature of Higher Education and Culture in Saudi Arabia:**

Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 by King Abdulaziz Al-Saud. At that time, poverty ran rampant and there existed only a modest educational system, including 12 schools and 700 students. The situation improved after the discovery of oil reservoirs. Schools proliferated and seven major universities were established (Simmons, Simmons, & Allah, 1994). Each university is located in a different region and has branches in different cities to serve people around the country (Alamri, 2011).

The Ministry of Higher Education was created in 1954 to coordinate the activities of the seven universities. The ministry has a number of rules including: authorizing universities to offer special programs in accordance with the country's needs; creating and administering universities and colleges in the Kingdom; enhancing the level of communication and coordination between institutions of higher learning; and coordinating with other governmental agencies in terms of their interests and needs (Alamri, 2011; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to Washington DC, 2011).

In Saudi Arabia, university admission is determined by three main factors: (a) the demand for higher education, (b) the need for qualified manpower, and (c) the capacity of the universities to recruit students (Alamri, 2011; Saleh, 1986). Higher education is subsidized and all-inclusive for Saudi citizens. Students get stipends for pursuing higher education.

International students who have been granted scholarships from Saudi Universities have the

same benefits as citizens. Recently, private institutions that provide higher education have proliferated. These private universities charge tuition, but nonetheless, are supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. In 2010, the Ministry of Higher Education subsidized Saudi students to attend private universities, which opened up opportunity for those who cannot attend public universities due to their low academic achievement in secondary schools or their desire to pursue different majors that are not available in the public universities (Alamri, 2011).

Saudi Arabian universities do not offer all degrees and majors, which increases the burden on the students who want to pursue a higher degree or specific majors. Moreover, higher education in Saudi Arabia does not place much emphasis on online education. However, online education is an important motivating element for many Saudi students in pursuing their degrees. The King Abdullah Scholarship Program has been established to overcome some of these limitations (Alamri, 2011).

#### **King Abdullah Scholarship Program and Financial Support:**

The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) is the most heavily endowed overseas scholarship program ever offered by a nation-state, and it is administered by the Ministry of Higher Education. Since 2005, over 120,000 Saudi students have been financed by this scholarship to pursue their university studies abroad (Hilal & Denman, 2013). According to Naffee (2014), the number of Saudi students studying in American colleges and universities reached 100,000 students in 2013-14. The main goal of the program is to bridge the gap between the educational sectors and labor markets through equipping skilled workers and harnessing proficient workforce for the future. It is also designed to increase patriotic

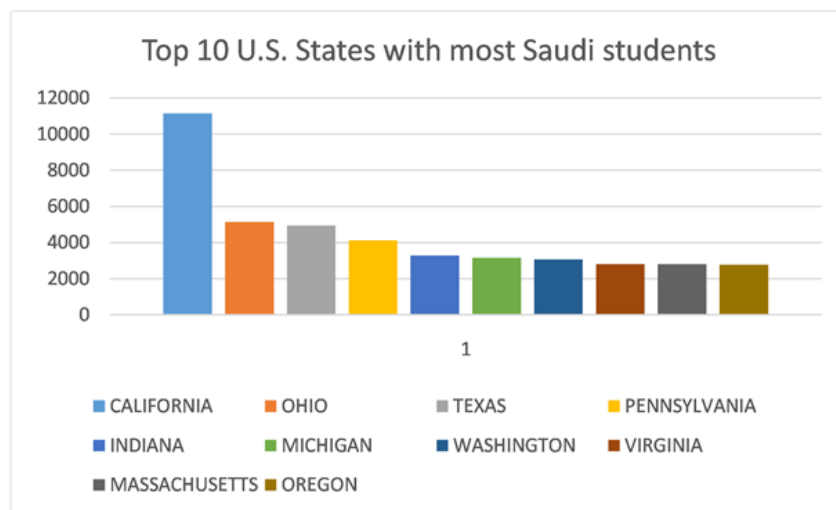
communication abroad, to extend a mutual understanding of cultures with the host countries, and to allow cultural exchanges with the intention of being beneficial for both Saudi Arabia as well as the host country (Taylor, & Albasri, 2014).

The majority of the sponsored students live in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (Alamri, 2011). The Saudi Ministry of Higher Education published a report by UNESCO ranking Saudi Arabia in fourth place in the world as to the success of their students abroad. Saudi Arabia lagged behind China, India, and South Korea. Additionally, UNESCO ranked Saudi Arabia as the first country in the world, rated per capita, for the number of students studying abroad (Alamri, 2011).

With regard to states, Saudi student's enrollment is varied. Figure 1 shows that in 2013, Saudi students attending California colleges reached the highest number (11,000 students). At the same year, the State of Ohio occupied the second number of Saudi students studying in its colleges with a number of 5,000 students. However, the states that are not included in the figure had lower numbers of Saudi students (less than 3000 students). Taylor and Albasri (2014) add that Saudi students prefer to study in California for two reasons: first, it has over 80 public and private colleges that are approved by Saudi's Ministry of Higher Education for participation in the KASP project; second, California has nice weather and many attractions to international travelers. Regarding the States of Ohio and other Midwestern States, some Saudi students might prefer to study in Midwest because "it has a large population of Arabic people offering students a community similar to what they might experience back home" (Taylor, & Albasri, 2014, p. 115).

Scholarships are granted to both genders. However, female students must be accompanied by a “Mahrram,” a male who is an immediate family member. Saudi students who are studying abroad get a stipend to cover college tuition, conference expenses, medical insurance, monthly checks (for living expenses and such), as well as one annual flight ticket to Saudi Arabia. Monthly stipends differ based on expenses accrued in the host country. Aside from tuition and other college expenses, for living expenditure in the United States students are given a monthly stipend of \$ 1,847 which is less than the amount granted for students in Canada. The wife and the Mahrram, if they are not students, receive monthly checks of \$ 1,500. Each child receives \$270 per month during their time away from home (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 2011).

Figure 1. States in the U.S. that Enroll the Largest Number of Saudi Students ((Taylor, & Albasri, 2014)



### **Conditions for Acceptance in the Scholarship Program for a Bachelor's Degree:**

The Ministry of Higher Education has laid down both general and specific guidelines for acceptance in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. These conditions are subject to periodic review during each stage in accordance with evolving circumstances and directives. The following are general and special conditions that the Ministry of Higher Education requires from Saudi citizens as conditions of their enrollment in the program:

#### 1- General conditions for all levels (Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral Degrees)

- The applicant must be a Saudi citizen.
- The applicant must not be a government employee.
- The applicant must study full-time and reside in the country designated.
- The applicant's age must fulfill the specific conditions for each level of study.
- A female applicant must have a legally acceptable male companion, who will be required to travel with her and remain with her until the completion of her scholarship study.

#### 2- Special conditions on bachelor applicants:

- The applicants' secondary school grades must not be less than 90% in the physical sciences division or its equivalent
- The applicant must pass a general aptitude test with a score not less than 80%
- The applicant must pass an achievement test with a score not less than 80%
- No more than three years must have passed since the applicant graduated from secondary school

- If the applicant was awarded an academic degree outside of the Kingdom, it must be validated by the relevant agency prior application to the program
- The applicant must not be more than 22 years old (The Ministry of Higher Education, 2011).

However, applicants can receive an exemption from the rules of the second phase, if they provide proof of admission from a university in the United States for a bachelor's degree program (The Ministry of Higher Education, 2011).

### **Saudi Women Education vs. Men:**

Segregation of schooling for men and women has been a part of Saudi Arabia's culture and education for much of the twentieth century (Hamdan, 2005). According to Moghadam (1998), gender segregation is a cultural concept that is evident in almost every public and private institution in Saudi Arabia. The government prohibits the mixing of the genders in most places and sectors like schools and universities, most places of entertainment, some parks, etc. Within the educational system, students' segregation lasts from elementary school until graduation. Not only does this segregation include students, but it also includes teachers for they cannot provide lectures to students of a different gender. However, with the scarcity of faculty in higher education, male professors could be allowed to present lectures to female students through monitors. Moreover, these students hold discussions with the professor via telephone (Metz, 1993).

The gender segregation norm in Saudi Arabia has been based on traditional views of gender in society as well as on Islamic laws from the Holy Book (Qur'an). According to Al-Saggaf (2004),

“Islam plays a central role in defining the culture, and acts as a major force in determining the social norms, patterns, traditions, obligations, privileges and practices of society” (p. 1). Thus, interactions are restricted between men and women when they are unrelated or unmarried (Alebaikan, 2010).

Alebaikan (2010) emphasizes that segregation of the genders influences all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia including education. In public education, males and females are directed into different courses by a differential tracking system. As such, males’ curriculum heavily focuses on traditional male activities, whereas females’ curriculum concentrates on their nurturing roles as mothers and housewives. As a result, Saudi women have experienced a limited range of fields for them in schools, universities, and colleges (AlMunajjed, 2009).

In Saudi universities, female students are not able to enroll for all majors as men do in which there are limited fields of specialization. At King Saud University in Riyadh, female students are not admitted to the College of Engineering or the College of Architecture and Planning. At The College of Computer Sciences, which was opened in the mid-1990s for female students, there is only one available specialty, computer applications. Conversely, male colleges boast a greater breadth of departments such as, computer science, computer engineering, and information systems (AlMunajjed, 2009).

In addition, at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, female students are not able to enroll in the College of Environmental Design, Agriculture in Dry Areas, Earth Sciences, Engineering, and Marine Sciences. Al Qassim University does not allow women to study the specializations of engineering, agriculture, veterinarian studies (AlMunajjed, 2009). Therefore, King Abdullah

Scholarship Program has been established to overcome and bridge the gap of these limitations, which allow students to seek various majors matched with their interests and abilities (Alamri, 2011).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Methodology**

#### **Focus of the Study:**

Single case studies can elucidate the importance of various factors contributing to college retention of Saudi students studying in the United States. This study includes two components to investigate this issue. The first component is a survey of 45 Saudi students studying in the United States. From this survey, the researcher examined the patterns of the factors affecting Saudi student retention based on the statistical analysis and percentages derived from their responses. In the second component, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with a sub-sample of 10 students selected from the first component. Within this construct (interview responses), truth is “what works” (Howe, 1988). Based on that, survey and interview items must be relevant to the “research question” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Herein, the following will be identified: selection and justification of the methodology, population under study, survey instrument, data collection and analysis, creditability, and limitations of the methodology.

#### **The Choice for a Case Study:**

A case study design was selected to explore the factors affecting Saudi students’ completion in three universities in the greater Milwaukee area. The use of a survey and face-to-face interviews allowed for exploration of a greater level of details related to the factors influencing the completion of an undergraduate degree. Moreover, this methodology produced

data that facilitated a better understanding of the background, struggles, and barriers that undergraduate Saudi students have experienced.

The case study design is an approach that explores a phenomenon within its real-life context. "Most of the better case studies rely on variety of sources" (Yin, 2013, p. 114). Integrating a survey and face-face-interviews into a single research study allows for a more detailed level of inquiry (Scholz, & Tietje, 2002). Yin (2013) states that relying on multiple sources of evidence increases the validity of the research through bringing rich details of data together as well as triangulating these data in the findings. While the survey helps to investigate the conditions within one of the entities being surveyed (giving brief information), the face-to face interview uses "how" or "why" research questions to bring more details about the phenomenon (Yin, 2013).

Using "single" case design rather than "multiple" cases provides the research's finding with more details about the subjects' story (Darke, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998; Yin, 2003). However, single case design cannot be generalized as widely as alternative designs. Yin (1994) argued that single case design does not allow the researcher to see two or three sets of literal replication and two or more deliberately contrasting replications, as multiple cases do. However, using a single case study would provide a good source of ideas about students' experiences and behaviors through bringing thick descriptions about their story and lives.

### **The Sample:**

Creswell (2002) emphasizes the importance of selecting participants who, "might provide useful information" and who, "might help people learn about the phenomenon, and

who might give voice to silenced people" (p. 193). Criterion sampling as a type of purposeful sampling was used in this study in which the researcher sets a criteria and selects all cases that meet that criteria. This method of sampling is very strong and reliable when it comes to quality assurance (Patton, 2005).

Saudis attending American universities form the population for this study; with a focus on undergraduate students enrolled between the years, 2010-15 (including students under the King Abdullah Scholarship). The unique advantage of selecting this sample is the ease of access to the data from this student population. The students in the sample and the researcher are from the same country. Sharing a common linguistic and cultural background facilitated obtaining access from the sample population. Moreover, there is a lack of research surrounding Saudi Arabian international students in the United States. Due to the limited research on this topic (Heyn, 2013), this study sheds light on the factors influencing Saudi students' persistence in U.S. universities. However, since this sample only covers Saudi students studying in American universities, it was not generalized or extrapolated to Saudi students enrolled in universities in Saudi Arabia.

Before interviewing the students, a survey of 45 participants (senior students) from three universities was conducted. The purpose of this initial survey was to find patterns (based on response's means or percentages) of the factors influencing student's persistence and retention. Upon completion of the surveys and analysis of the patterns, a small sub-sample of 10 students was selected for face-to-face interviews. On the consent form of the survey, the participants were informed that some of them will be selected for follow-up interviews. In the sub-sample they provided more details on their experiences related to persistence in colleges.

All of the participants were drawn from the State of Wisconsin, particularly from the City of Milwaukee. The researcher included students from public and private universities which provided additional insights into retention rates. In other words, environmental and social factors affecting student retention may operate differently in the universities that were selected. The three universities involved in this study have a large number of Saudi students enrolled in various majors.

The recruitment of participants took place with the assistance of the presidents of various Saudi Students Clubs (SSC) and clubs constituted by the Saudi government to organize activities for Saudi students (as well as helping them with academic affairs). These presidents are selected by Saudi Arabia's Cultural Mission (SACM) which are specialized agencies created by the Saudi government in 1951 to administer programs to meet the educational and cultural needs of Saudis studying in the United States (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, n.d.). The participants took an online survey, and the presidents only reminded the students to complete the survey.

In addition to contacting the presidents of SSC, snowball sampling was used. The Saudi student's community in Milwaukee is small and socially connected. As a result, snowball sampling increased the recruitment size and diversity of participants (Tracy, 2013). For the study, each individual was asked to provide names of their Saudi friends (senior standing) who are studying in Milwaukee. The researcher then contacted these students to fill the survey and to conduct the interview.

The students' status varied in terms of gender, majors, socioeconomic status (see appendix A), school status, and whether they were in public or private school. These were used as the independent variables for the constant of this study. For instance, the sample included participants from different universities in order to determine which outside factors were held in common as they impact students in continuing their collegiate careers. Similarly, for the sub-sample, the participants were selected based on their genders, majors, and schools.

Criteria for selecting the participants included: (1) status as an undergraduate student, (2) students who are shortly expecting to graduate (senior), (3) the school year of 2015-2016, (4) and only Saudi students who are under the King Abdullah Scholarship program because this will facilitate the controlling of economic costs of college tuition.

### **Survey Instrument**

#### **Measures (Scales) and Demographic Variables:**

In order to see the patterns of factors affecting Saudi students completion of their degree in the U.S., 36 Likert-scale questions were organized into six scales (Personal, Psychological, Faculty, Engagement, University Services, and Financial scales; see appendix A) to see which one of these scales got higher responses or percentages than others. The researcher included all these six scales to accomplish the objectives of this study which are exploring Saudi students' experiences toward the factors motivating them toward completion their bachelor's degree, as well as identifying the factors creating obstacles for their graduation in American universities.

These scales were selected based on their importance of each construct revealed within the extant literature. The reviewed literature has explored students' retention from different aspect (institutional, personal and psychological, and financial). According to Seidman (2005), considerable attention has been paid to developing and testing theories as to why some students, whether international or domestic students, leave while others persist. Investigation of retention within university programs has suggested that personal attributes of students were the primary reason for their departure from college (Tinto, 2006). Over the course of ten years, research has found that personal attributes were not sufficient within the investigation of retention and dropout which led them to include institutional characteristics (Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). Over a subsequent ten years, researchers expanded this model to examine it from psychological, environmental, organizational, and economic perspectives (Seidman, 2005).

Highlighting the importance of these measures, many researchers have examined student retention on domestic and international students. Astin (1993), Andrade (2006), and Akhtarkhavari (1994) studied such individual and psychological factors (as peer support, self-esteem, self-efficacy, English proficiency, and academic achievement) and their effect on student retention. Similarly, faculty interaction has been considered by most studies as a motivating factor for student retention (Tinto's, 2006), especially international students (Andrade, 2008). Regarding student engagement, some researchers have studied international students' experiences while on U.S. collegiate and university campuses including their engagement (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Allen et al., 2008; Andrade, 2008; Robbins et al., 2004). University services was also examined to explore the retention rate (Al-nusair, 2000; Andrade, 2008; Manese et al., 1985; Shabeeb, 1996). Moreover, financial influence has been studied as

effective factor that facilitates student completion of their degree (Kennamer, Katsinas, & Schumacker, 2010; Singell, 2004). Therefore, examining these scale separately would provide a clear result concerning retention and dropout factors.

For the Personal scale, Friedman and Mandel (2009) defines it as the characteristics or motivations that lead a person to accomplish a specific goal. Students may persist to complete their bachelor's degree because they have personal reasons. The items of these personal reason include: ambitions and goals, better prospective careers, improving skills, pride of gaining the degree (Akhtarkhavari, 1994), having high GPA, and English proficiency (Kwai (2009). In literature, all these items were conducted on international students explaining how they affect these students' completion to their degree.

The Psychological scale focuses on the students' feelings of their ability and environments where they live and how that affect their behavior and performance (Friedman & Mandel, 2009). The scale includes four items as motivating elements influencing Saudi students to complete their bachelor's degree in American universities. These item include: peer support (Andrade, 2008), not having difficulty in making friendship with Americans outside the campus (Yang et al., 1994), self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Andrade, 2006). Both the "peer support" and "not finding difficulty in making friendship" items were added to the psychological scale because when a student feels of difficulty in making friendship or has lower level of peer support, he/she might fell of alienation which affects him/her psychologically. In the literature, all items were conducted on international students. As a result, this scale was better constructed to find the patterns clearly.

Regarding the Faculty scale, Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), defines it as the interaction between the student and faculty member inside and outside of classroom. Faculty interaction is measured using these items: (1) their communication with students outside the classroom, (2) their knowledge, (3), their flexibility with students, (4) their interaction with students inside the classroom, (5) their consideration for student's absence and circumstances, and (6) amount of the assignment required from the students (Andrade, 2008). In the literature, all items were studied on international students.

The Engagement scale is defined as the extent that students feel engaged to the college environment through interacting with peers inside and outside of the university and how that contributes to their completion of their degree (Robbins et al., 2004). It also includes their connection to the university community and people in general. This scale includes six items which are: (1) communication with students, (2) interaction with classmate inside the classroom, (3) communication with classmate outside the classroom (4) providing help by classmates (Allen et al., 2008; Andrade, 2008), (5) engagement with American students, and (6) engagement with Saudi students and community (Akhtarkhavari, 1994). Items selected from Allen's et al. (2008) study were on international students, and Akhtarkhavari's (1994) study include Saudi student in the United States.

A University Services scale was also examined. Friedman and Mandel (2009) state that institutional variables, which include services and facilities provided by the university, help students adjust socially and academically. These services include academic support and counseling centers for students with academic difficulty as well as entertainment activities and facilities. So, this scale focus on how these facilities and support services help the participants

to complete their bachelor's degree in the U.S. This scale includes seven items which are: (1) satisfaction with services provided by the writing center (Al-nusair, 2000), (2) counselor help to solve student's problems (Nilsson et al., 2004), (3) campus community (Andrade, 2008), (4) university cultural activities, (5) university athletic activities, (6) university recreation activities (Shabeeb, 1996), and (7) matching student's skills to the university courses (Manese et al., 1985). All these items depended on literatures that are conducted on international and Saudi students because these students' needs could differ from American students' needs.

Concerning the Financial scale, Robbins et al., 2004 explained items related to this construct as, "the extent to which students are supported financially by an institution" (p. 267). The items of this scale include the expenses that are provided by the Saudi government. The goal is to find student satisfaction with this support and how it contributes to their completion in the United States. The items are about the expenses of tuition, book and class materials, allotment for rent and other living expenses, food, transportation, and child care. These items were constructed based on the students benefits they receive from their government (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 2011).

After analyzing these scales, the researcher used the demographic questions (gender, age, majors, family monthly income, father education, mother education, father work, and mother work) as independent variables to compare the mean response scores across all six scales, using t-tests and ANOVA depending on the level of groups within each independent variable. Post hoc comparisons were used to explore significant ANOVA findings.

### **Data Collection:**

The survey began by focusing on identifying the patterns of factors contributing to Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities through the percentage breakdown of students' responses. In addition, the survey included background questions at the beginning to identify how these patterns potentially changed based on participants' characteristics (e.g. marital status, gender, etc.; see appendix A). Demographic questions enable researchers to find unique groups, trends in subject's behavior, and more efficient ways to target and cater to the subjects (Fink, 2002).

The survey was web-based and accessed through URL and was sent to all current Saudi students identified by the SACM and (SSC). It was written in English since the participants speak both Arabic and English. An informed-consent form was posted on the web as the opening page of the survey. Participants clicked on the button below, saying "I agree to complete this survey," thus expressing their compliance to participate in the study and complete the survey.

A week before the survey was available for the students on the web, the participants received a notification from the (SSC) about the importance of student input in order to increase the completion rate. Dillman (2000) suggested a three phase follow-up sequence to decrease the response rate error and solicit a relatively high response rate of the survey: (1) Five days after distributing the survey URL, an e-mail reminder will be sent out; (2) Ten days later, the second e-mail reminder will be sent; (3) Two weeks later, the third e-mail reminder will be sent stating emphatically the importance of the participant's input for the study.

### **Data Analysis:**

Before proceeding with the statistical analysis of the survey responses, the screening of the data was conducted on univariate and multivariate levels (Kline, 2011; Fidell & Tabachnick, 2006). First, the data entry in SPSS was revised by another person to make sure there were no mistakes or missing values. The null-responses on items were excluded from analyses and their respective scale-means were adjusted for the absence of a valid item-response (automatically adjusted by the default). To deal with missing values, Fidell and Tabachnick (2006) recommend deleting of cases which have missing values when only small number of them have missing values and the missing is random.

In addition, the researcher checked minimum and maximum scores within range to see if they lie within the acceptable range of values. skewness & kurtosis were conducted. The statistical assumptions for t-test, One-way ANOVA, and post hoc were considered to calculate the results accurately. Descriptive statistics for the survey items were written and explained briefly in the text and reported in tabular form. And frequency analysis was record response percentages to all survey questions.

For the main analysis, data were analyzed using the SPSS version 22. Descriptive analysis was conducted to find the percentages and patterns (through means comparison) of factors affecting undergraduate Saudi students in the completion of their bachelor's degree in the U.S. The survey includes multiple choice, dichotomous answers like "Yes" and "No" (No = 0; Yes = 1). Moreover, these factors were measured on a continuous 6-point Likert-type scale in the questionnaire ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), and no response takes (0) (see appendix A); as the following:

- Strongly disagree.
- Disagree.
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree.
- Strongly agree.
- No response

Finally, the researcher used the demographic questions (gender, age, majors, family monthly income, father education, mother education, father work, and mother work) to see how the means may differ between these categories using the T-Test (compares two means) and One-Way ANOVA test (compares more than two means). They are the best tests for this data and the number of independent variables used in this study. Since One-Way ANOVA test do not determine which variables are different, post hoc tests were run to find where the differences occurred between the groups.

As a result of the pattern observed in these planned analyses, novel exploratory hypotheses were created to see if the means of these responses or scales are significantly different with consideration to these demographic variables.

- Hypotheses for T-Test included (gender, father and mother work):

The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):  $\mu_1 - \mu_2 = d$  (there is no significant difference between the two means).

The alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):  $\mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq d$  (there is a significant difference between the two means).

- Hypothesis for One-Way ANOVA test included (age, majors, family monthly income, father education, mother education):

The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):  $\mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3 = \mu_n$  (all population means are equal).

The alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): (there is at least one mean is significantly different).

The criteria of significance depended on ( $\alpha = .05$ ) (two tailed) looking to a value with  $p < .05$  as a significant value (Howell, 2012).

**Reliability:**

With regards to the survey analysis, reliability of the instrument is essential for eliminating errors that might arise from measurement problems in the research study (Joy, 2007). “Reliability” refers to the accuracy and precision of a measurement tool in which the measure produces similar results under consistent conditions (Thorndike, 1997). The stability or test-retest reliability of the survey instrument was obtained through pilot testing. Test-retest reliability was achieved when the same results are obtained after repeated administering of the same survey to similar study participants. After checking the reliability, the scales means and demographic variables were examined.

For the study, before beginning the main analyses, Cronbach’s alpha was used to examine this reliability (with 45 participants). The acceptable values in Cronbach’s alpha are generally values  $>0.70$  (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). This analysis determined which items were inappropriate within their currently assigned scale, and guided re-assignment or deletion of the item. Gliem and Gliem (2003) emphasize that removing items which are not highly correlated

and consistent with other items in the same scales is a justifiable psychometric adjustment in order to increase reliability.

### **Face-to-Face Interviews**

#### **Data Collection:**

Data collection for the face-to-face interviews occurred after distributing the survey and finding the patterns of factors affecting Saudi students in the completion of their degree. Accordingly, the content of the protocol questions was informed by these results. The one case study design (Stake, 1995) was used for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data. A case study is an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case over time, through articulated in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Stake, 1995; Creswell & Maietta, 2002; Creswell, 2002; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The primary advantage of case study research is its deeper understanding of specific instances of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this study, the instrumental case served the purpose of “illuminating a particular issue,” (such as Saudi students’ persistence to complete their degree at U.S. universities), providing insight into an issue (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2002, p. 485).

The primary technique was conducting in-depth, semi-structured, face-to face interviews with 10 students. Interviews assist researchers in grasping people’s construct of reality, providing insights into the case, especially if the information emanates from key players or elites (Yin, 2013). Moreover, a face-to-face interview can evoke invaluable information to the interviewer that can supplement the verbal answer of the interviewee (because of body language, facial expressions, etc.) (Opdenakker, 2006).

The Interview Protocol included various open-ended questions and was first pilot-tested. Literature has suggested that personal (Heyn, 2013), academic (Shaw, 2010), and financial factors (Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Shabeeb, 1996) contribute to students' adjustment to complete their degree. In other words, academic skills, cumulative grade point average (GPA), racism and prejudice, and weather conditions may affect Saudi student's ability to complete their degree in the United States (Heyn, 2013). In addition, Shaw (2010) focused on the academic factors concluding that Saudi students in the United States had academic difficulty that limit their retention rate. These students also spent more time in the following activities; study skills, study groups, taking advantage of campus resources, hard work, and persistence to increase their achievement and success. Regarding the financial factors, Shabeeb's (1996) finding that financial aid was the least effective factor for Saudi students' completion of their degree led the researcher to study why these students do not see it as important.

After finishing the pilot study, the interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, and the estimated time for each interview was an hour. The interviewer spoke in both English and Arabic, allowing the participants to select the preferred language in which they were most comfortable. The interview utilized two versions of the interview protocol: a version using Arabic and one conducted in English. Then, the researcher transcribed these interviews into English.

Creswell (2002) emphasizes that in order to avoid the potential harm research can cause to participants, researchers should obtain an informed consent to ensure the privacy of participants. At the end of the online survey, participants were asked to sign a consent form to conduct the voluntary interview in order to receive a follow-up interview.

As such, the interviewee had the right to withdraw their participation from the study at any point. The participants involved in the research are de-identified. Furthermore, they were allowed to refuse to answer any questions during the interview. The interview was tape-recorded (with the permission of the participants) and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, the participants had an opportunity to change any information provided, when necessary, and the contents were able to be corrected at the discretion of the interviewee even after the transcription occurred.

For the pilot-testing of the study, five Saudi students from Unvisited of Wisconsin-Milwaukee were examined. These students were juniors. The participants were debriefed to obtain information on the clarity of the interview questions and their relevance to the study's aim. The participants of this pilot-testing were excluded from the main study.

#### **Data Analysis:**

Since the survey results are important to find patterns affecting Saudi students to complete their degree in the U.S., the researcher used these factors as a guide for the face-to-face analysis. The interview protocol was constructed based on the survey measures or scales. As a result, students' responses concerning the interview phase should be to explain these measures in more details. In other words, interviews may also be conducted after analyzing surveys to improve understanding about interesting or unanticipated results.

Prior to data analysis, the interviews were transcribed into well-documented notes. The process of transcription allowed the researchers to convert interviews into more easily interpreted data for a better and clearer analysis (Creswell, 2009). These annotations were

saved in a Microsoft word file. To protect participants' information and otherwise safeguard the privacy of the participants, all pertinent documents were saved in a password-protected file.

The primary researcher analyzed the interview data to discern their meaning. The researcher read each transcript multiple times and noted possible theme-related words in the margins (theories or short phrases that sum up what is being said in the text). Creswell (2012) stated that a researcher should be immersed in the data and read the interview transcripts in their entirety several times before proceeding to analyze the data. Based on that, the researcher made a summary statement or single word for each element that was discussed in the transcript.

After reading the interviews, the researcher coded the interviews in-full using NVivo application, a program which aided the researcher with his analysis, coding, and collating. The analysis utilized two phases to construct codes: primary cycle coding and secondary cycle coding. For the primary cycle coding (initial coding), the researcher read through textual data (interviews) and notes in the margins of thematic-words (as mentioned before) in a systematic way. This type of coding was chosen to examine, compare and search for similarities and differences throughout the data (Tracy, 2013). The analysis also included a codebook that identified all nodes (parent codes) and sub-nodes (child codes), defined each node and sub-node, and provided an example of each code and sub-code. Tracy (2013) states that "Codebooks help the researcher meet the challenges of getting his head around pages of transcripts" (p. 189).

In the secondary cycle phase the researcher categorized “first phase codes” into larger hierarchical codes through sorting them into some sort of order or groups. For example, researchers in this phase identify codes that continually reappear in the data and connect them together in a specific way (Tracy, 2013). After that, the researcher created memos to his analysis in a separate document. Memos refers to the act of recording reflective notes about what the researcher (fieldworker, data coder, and/or analyst) is learning from the data (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). According to Tracy (2013), memos help the researcher synthesize and derive meaning from the codes. The memos incorporated such information for rationale behind each code, details about what the coded text revealed, the manner such codes were changed, and outlined the significance and relationship between codes or categories.

As a way to start theming the procedure, the researcher split and grouped codes into refined and simplified themes. In other words, the researcher looked carefully at words and phrases that potentially indicated relationships among disparate concepts. The work of Braun and Clarke (2006) served as the guideline for the thematic analysis of the data. They state that the researcher should be intimately familiar with the data and primary codes used and that data should be analyzed and sifted multiple times. The researcher is then able to discern significant patterns, which helps in the formulation of the most solid conclusions derived from the study. Finally, the researcher identified the common or universal themes that fit with the survey results and scales.

### **Establishing Credibility:**

The criteria for judging a qualitative study differs from that of quantitative research (Joy, 2007). In qualitative design, the researcher tests “believability”, based on coherence, insight, and instrumental utility through a process of verification rather than through traditional validity and reliability measures (Eisner, 1991). The credibility criteria tests the verifiability of the information gathered based on the perspective of the participant (Denzin, 2009).

To seek the validity of the findings in the second (qualitative) phase, the researcher determined the extent to which the information mirrors reality through using four primary forms, as Creswell (2003) suggests: (1) Triangulation – converging different sources of information (interviews and survey results); (2) Member checking – gathering feedback from the participants on the accuracy of the identified categories and themes; (3) Providing a rich, multi-layered description to convey the findings, and finally (4) External audit –asking a person outside of the project to conduct a thorough, independent review of the study (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Miller, 2000). For member checking, the researcher contacted all participants to check the transcript as well as asking them about some missing information that was needed for the study purpose. However, only two females did not respond to check these transcripts.

### **Source Material**

Pertinent material to facilitate this study came from different sources. First, information from Journal articles were used as primary source material for this study. The work included contemporary articles on the factors that promote student retention and also those that

provide a historical perspective. The majority of the articles used have been downloaded from the electronic library at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) as well as the ProQuest website. Other materials were obtained from the Google scholar journal section.

Second, in addition to journal articles the study made use of a variety of sources such as books and dissertations, which are parts of the literature review. Third, the researcher used the main website of the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia (the ministry responsible for students' scholarship inside and outside the country) to review issues related to students such as: scholarship amount, student benefits, and the like.

Various dissertations and books were read to get an understanding of the ways that researchers write in a professional manner. Books written by well-known authors such as Creswell, Denzin, Braun and Clarke, and Johnston have been used to emphasize the importance of using the proper methodology. These sources also provided direction for researchers in understanding the formal method of collecting data, selecting methods, and analyzing and transcribing the interviews in addition to citing bibliographies. The bibliographical form was set in the manner prescribed by the American Psychological Association Style (APA), which presents a logical and common writing structure among the social sciences.

The requisite skills for the study were interpretation of the audio recordings, transcription, and formal translation. The collected data was organized in the English language, but the researcher translated Arabic to ensure accuracy of statements. As a result, the researcher's command of English as well as Arabic was of paramount importance. With Arabic

as the native language, and English as the professional language, the researcher did not face any major obstacles during the data-gathering phase.

The researcher made use of a recorder during the interviews. These recordings were subsequently used to dictate the interview within a controlled environment. These recorded interviews are stored on a secured server. The recordings were converted into music file format (MP3) for enhanced sounds. The whole transcript was written and presented in English.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All of the participants were treated with the utmost respect as outlined by the ethical guidelines and protocols of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since the research study did not involve any private or confidential information about the participants, the study did not hold any readily identifiable risks.

As the students and the researcher were from the same country and culture, it was easy for the researcher to collect the data. In addition, the small Saudi community in Milwaukee helped the researcher to communicate with the students. However, the researcher found difficulty in recruiting female participants because of cultural factors. These female might avoid participating because they get shy to talk with males in a quiet place. As a result, there were only four females who participated for the face-to-face interviews.

## Summary

Single case design was utilized in this study using survey and interviews. Qualitative approaches helped the researcher achieve a better understanding of the individual's beliefs, attitudes, motivations, demands, or obstacles that subjects experience (Creswell, 2012). In particular, the researcher used a case study design because it provided an opportunity to seek, discover and understand a phenomenon by allowing Saudi students to participate in an interview, while discussing the actual experiences they have had at U.S. Universities.

The data collection instruments used in this study were a survey (to ascertain the pattern and percentages of factors affecting retention) and individual interviews. The survey (Appendix A) was emailed to the individuals with a consent form to participate (Appendix D), and the individual interviews took place within a week thereafter. Then, the researcher transcribed these interviews (verbatim) and analyzed the resultant data. The analysis depended on two steps to construct codes: primary cycle coding and secondary cycle coding. In the primary cycle coding, the researcher created initial coding through annotation. Then, the researcher categorized these codes into larger hierarchical codes in order to create themes. At the end of the study, the researcher conducted strategies to increase the credibility of the study, such as triangulation, member checking, providing thick description, and external audit (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Results and Findings**

#### **First: Survey Results Section**

##### **Objectives & Hypotheses**

The main objective of the study was to identify factors that contribute to undergraduate Saudi students' motivation to remain enrolled and complete their Bachelor's degree in an American-based University. Six possible motivating factors were identified based on the literature reviewed in this area of research.

1. Institutional factors and support services
2. Academic advisors and faculty
3. GPA and percentage of credit hours completed
4. Governmental aid
5. Social integration
6. Cultural and linguistic factors

Demographic and socioeconomic factors were also thought to be potentially related to students' retention and persistence to complete their U.S. undergraduate degrees. Variables thought to most likely be related include age, gender, major, family income, educational history of the mother and father, and work status of the mother and father.

The domains selected were all expected to be highly endorsed by Saudi undergraduate students enrolled at American universities. There were no directional hypotheses on specific factors being more highly endorsed than others. A description of the interrelationship of these factors was thus an objective of the study. There were also no directional hypotheses on the

demographic factors; again, identifying and describing how these variables are related to motivating factors was an objective of this study.

## **Measures**

Scales related to the factors mentioned above were created from questions deemed representative of each domain. The six scales with their associated questions are found in Appendix A. Responses to each question were given on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Moreover, the survey includes multiple choice, dichotomous answers like “Yes” and “No” (No = 0; Yes = 1). Scale total scores were calculated by averaging the response-associated scores. Demographic and socioeconomic data were collected by either ordinal or scalar responses. A question related to the effectiveness of SACM (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission) Orientation was included at the end of the questionnaire set.

## **Data Collection**

All items from the above measures were administered to a sample of 45 Saudi students with senior standing across three universities in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee School of Engineering, and Cardinal Stritch University). A web-based interface was used to capture data. The participants received an email including the survey link. The study materials and methodology were evaluated and cleared by each of the institute’s ethics board.

## **Planned Analyses**

For all analyses SPSS version 23.0 was used. First, reliability values were calculated for each scales separately. The results of these analyses were used to guide scale refinement, and these refined-scales were then used in subsequent analyses (see details in the results section).

Next, descriptive analysis and details about the sample and the mean of each scale were discussed. Finally, the researcher used the demographic questions (gender, age, majors, family monthly income, father education, mother education, father work, and mother work) as independent variables to compare the mean response scores across all six scales using t-tests and ANOVA depending on the level of groups within each independent variable. The criteria of significance depended on ( $\alpha = .05$ ) (two tailed) looking to a value with  $p < .05$  as a significant value (Howell, 2012).

## **Results**

### **Reliability**

The reliability of the survey items was examined twice utilizing a Cronbach's alpha test. The acceptable values in Cronbach's alpha are generally values  $>0.70$  (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). The analyses were conducted twice due to the initial findings that two scales (psychological and faculty) had lower internal reliability scores than 0.7 ( $r = 0.42$  &  $0.58$ , respectively). Consequently, the researcher removed some items that affect the consistency of these scales. When all items were evaluated for cross-scale internal reliability, certain items were not highly inter-correlated regardless of the Cronbach's alpha being above the established cut-off. As result, the researcher modified these scales through eliminating these questions or added them to different scales as shown in Table 1. Gliem and Gliem (2003) emphasize that removing items which are not highly correlated and consistent with other items in the same scales is a justifiable psychometric adjustment in order to increase reliability.

In this study, the researcher created six scales (personal, psychological, faculty, engagement, university services, and financial). There were 36 questions under these scales (see appendix A). The researcher added or deleted some of these questions based on reliability scores. These added questions still align with the literature. As Table 1 indicates, for the Psychological scale, the question (I have been supported by peers) was eliminated because it decreased the scale reliability. Moreover, the question (I do not have difficulty to making friends with Americans outside the university) was changed and added to the engagement scale because it affected reliability score too. As a result, self-efficacy and esteem were the psychological measure for the participants to complete their degree. The Engagement scale after modification includes (1) communication with students, (2) interaction with classmate inside the classroom, (3) communication with classmate outside the classroom (4) providing help by classmates, (5) engagement with American students, (6) engagement with Saudi students and community, and (7) not having difficulty to making friends with Americans outside the university.

Similarly, the question (my academic skills match university course requirements) was deleted from the University and Services scale and added to the Personal scale because of its lower reliability score. Then, the Personal scales becomes associated with these items: ambitions and goals, better prospective careers, improving skills, pride of gaining the degree, having high GPA, English proficiency, and matching courses to students' skills. For the University and Services scales, the items are: (1) satisfaction with services provided by the writing center (2) counselor help to solve student's problems (3) campus community, (4) university cultural activities, (5) university athletic activities, (6) university recreation activities.

Finally, the question (my scholarship covers all my tuition expenses) was eliminated because all participants have a scholarship (sample inclusion and criteria) that pays university tuition as well as it affected reliability score. Therefore, the financial variables affecting the participants to complete their bachelor's degree are book and class materials, allotment for rent and other living expenses, food, transportation, and child care.

Table 1. Item Adjustment Summary

Question (item)	Old Scale	New Status of the Item
I have been supported by peers	Psychological	Eliminated (not added)
I do not have difficulty to making friends with Americans outside the university	Psychological	Added to engagement scale
My academic skills match university course requirements	University and services	Added to personal scale
My scholarship covers all my tuition expenses	Financial	Eliminated (not added)

The subsequent reliability analyses identified improved Cronbach alpha values. Table 2 indicates that The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for all scales came out as larger than 0.7 with the exception of the faculty scale which was about of 0.6. Given the marginally lower reliability for the faculty scale, interpretation of the results related to this scale was cautious. In general, there was a good internal consistency of the items in scales. The reliability for all subscales together was examined also. It was found to be highly reliable (34 items;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

Table 2. Internal Reliability Analysis Summary

Scales	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Personal	7	0.87
Psychological	2	0.71
Faculty	6	0.60
Engagement	7	0.80
University Services	7	0.76
Financial	5	0.81
Overall scales	34	0.88

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics of the 45 participants. The gender break down is 31 males (69%) and 14 females (31%). Participants age primarily fall into the 21-25 years old category, consisting of 32 participants (71.1%). In addition, 71.1% of participants were single ( $n = 32$ ) and 24.4% were married ( $n = 11$ ), representing the two highest percentages in marital variables. Thirty-nine participants (86.7%) responded that they do not have children, whereas the remaining participants responded to have one or two children.

With regard to majors, engineering and business were the most frequent in the study representing 24 (53.3%) and 11 (24.4%) respectively. Out of 45 participants there were only two students who worked part time representing 4.5%, and the working hours for these people were 10 hours or less per week. The remaining 43 participants do not work.

Table 3. Descriptives of Participant Demographic and Socioeconomic Status

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	31	69
female	14	31
Age:		
16-20	1	2.2
21-25	32	71.1
26-30	11	24.4
31-35	1	2.2
Marital status:		
Single	32	71.1
Married	11	24.4
Divorced	1	2.2
Widowed	1	2.2
Children number		
0	39	86.7
1	3	6.7
2	3	6.7
Majors:		
Engineering	24	53.3
Business	11	24.4
Humanities	1	2.2
Medicine and health care	7	15.6
Other	2	4.4

Continued...		
Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Do you work as a part time student on campus?		
No	43	95.5
Yes	2	4.5
Work hours (10 or less)	2 out of two who works	100

Table 4 displays the participant's parental characteristics. Sixteen participants responded as having a monthly income of less than \$2000. Participants with higher than \$8000 were of an equal proportion as well. Forty-two percent of respondents' fathers had completed 4-year college degree (bachelor), and 68.9% of fathers were employed. Mothers' education level for a bachelor's degree is 35.6% which is the highest in this category. This number, in turn, is lower than fathers' education level. Also 68.9% of the respondents indicated that their mothers do not have a job.

Table 4. Socioeconomic and Descriptive data of Participants' Families

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Family monthly income		
Less than \$2000	16	35.6
2000-\$4000	6	13.3
4001-\$8000	7	15.6
More than \$8000	16	35.6

Continued...		
Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Father education level		
Less than High School	5	11.1
High School/GED	9	20.0
Some College	4	8.9
2-Year College Degree	4	8.9
4-Year College Degree	19	42.2
Advanced Degree	3	6.7
Does your father work		
No	14	31.1
Yes	31	68.9
Mother education level		
Less than High School	10	22.2
High School/GED	7	15.6
Some College	4	8.9
2-Year College Degree	4	8.9
4-Year College Degree	16	35.6
Advanced Degree	3	6.7
Does your Mother work		
No	31	68.9
Yes	14	31.1

#### **Attending SACM Orientation:**

As shown at the end of the demographic questions in the survey (appendix A), there is a question asking students about whether or not they benefited from the orientation provided by the ministry of higher education which is run by Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission (SACM). In the orientation the students are provided with information on the countries where they will be studying. Table 5 shows that 71.1 % of participants do not think the orientation was very useful

to them. Some of them stated that the orientation was not sufficient to provide the necessary information needed to study abroad.

Table 5. Benefit of the Orientation by the Ministry of Higher Education

Variable	Frequency	percentage
Did the orientation provided by the ministry of higher education help you to adjust better in the United States?		
No	32	71.1
Yes	13	28.9

### Scale Analyses

Exploratory descriptives for all six scales were examined to help describe participant response patterns. Skewness and Kurtosis values were evaluated to examine symmetry and normality. Statistically, skewness and Kurtosis with a value that is close to 0 (zero) indicates to symmetric and normality respectively. Curran, West, and Finch (1996) argue that moderate normality thresholds of 2.0 and 7.0 should be used for skewness and kurtosis respectively. As seen in Table 6, all skewness and kurtosis values were below the established cutoffs, except the personal scale which had values that crossed both cutoffs (skewness = -2.70; kurtosis = 8.53). These findings indicate that all scales were normally distributed, except for the personal scale which had responses highly clustered around the positive-end of the response scale. Thus, the personal scale had the largest frequency of occurrence, indicating students' responses were

mostly between agree and strongly agree. Since the normality violation was isolated to only one scale and ANOVA is robust against violations of normality, all ANOVA analyses were run as planned.

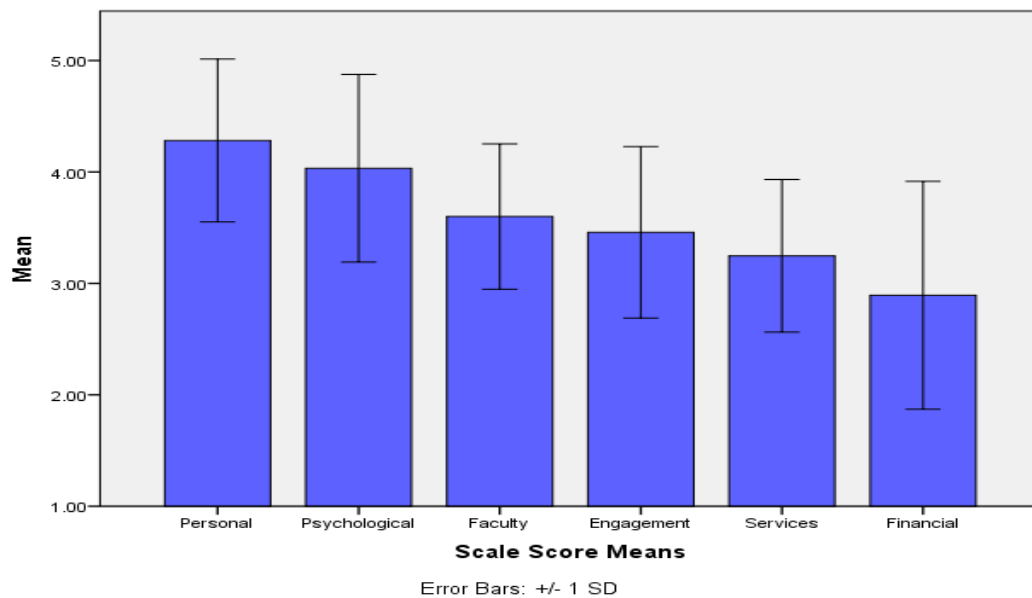
As can be seen in Figure 2, the personal and psychological scales occupied the two highest average ( $M=4.30$ ,  $SD=0.73$ ;  $M=4.03$ ,  $SD=0.84$ , respectively). However, the lowest average was registered for the financial scale with a mean ( $M=2.90$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ). More details will be provided in the next chapter (discussion section).

Table 6. Response Descriptives for Scales

Variable	M	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness
Personal	4.30*	0.73	8.53	-2.70
Psychological	4.03*	0.84	0.26	-0.80
Faculty	3.60	0.65	-0.27	-0.03
Engagement	3.50	0.77	-0.96	0.01
Services	3.25	0.68	-0.43	-0.57
financial	2.90*	1.02	-0.51	0.12

Note: M = the mean  
SD = the standard deviation.

Figure 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Sub-scales



## Mean Comparison Analyses

### *Gender Differences:*

The role of this analysis was to see whether males or females reported different levels of means about their answers toward factors affecting their completion for each scale separately (personal, psychological, faculty, engagement, services, and financial). In other words, independent t-test was run to understand whether there is a difference between these scales based on gender. As shown in Table 7, there are 31 males and 14 females. Statistically, an independent-samples *t*-test indicated that scores were not significantly different for women and men,  $p's > .05$ . Therefore, students' responses toward these items are not significantly different between genders.

Table 7. Gender Differences in Scale Responses

Variable	N	M	SD	(DF)	t-value	P-value)
Personal						
Male	31	4.2	0.7	43	-0.90	0.3
Female	14	4.4	0.8			
Psychological						
Male	31	4.0	0.8	43	-0.01	0.9
Female	14	4.0	0.9			
Faculty						
Male	31	3.6	0.6	43	0.28	0.8
Female	14	3.6	0.8			
Engagement						
Male	31	3.6	0.8	36.2	1.40	0.2
Female	14	3.2	0.7			
University Services						
Male	31	3.2	0.7	43	-1.00	0.3
Female	14	3.4	0.7			
Financial						
Male	31	2.9	1.1	43	0.12	0.9
Female	14	2.9	0.8			

Note: for the Engagement scale, Levene's equality of variance assumption was violated, thus the alternative statistic is reported.

N= the number of subjects & DF = degree of freedom

### ***Age Differences:***

Age was examined to see if the students' responses differ based on this category. Since there were only 2 participants in the 16-20 and 31-35 categories, they were excluded. A t-test was used to compare the remaining two categories. Table 8 reveals that comparison included participants in age categories 21-25 and 26-30 with ( $n=32$  and  $n=11$ ) respectively. All

comparisons were non-significant indicating that there were not significant differences between the two groups on these six measures,  $p's > 0.05$ .

Table 8. Age Association with Students' Responses

Age	N	M	SD	DF	t-value	P-value
Personal						
21-25	32	4.3	0.7	41	0.3	0.6
26-30	11	4.2	0.9			
Psychological						
21-25	32	4.1	0.8	41	1.4	0.9
26-30	11	3.7	0.9			
Faculty						
21-25	32	3.6	0.6	41	1.2	0.7
26-30	11	3.4	0.7			
Engagement						
21-25	32	3.4	0.8	41	-1.1	0.2
26-30	11	3.7	0.7			
University Services						
21-25	32	3.2	0.7	41	-0.9	0.2
26-30	11	3.4	0.5			
Financial						
21-25	32	3.0	1.0	41	0.6	0.9
26-30	11	2.8	0.9			

### ***Marital Status:***

Similar to the age test, marital status was examined to see if the students' responses differed based on their status. Since there was only one participant in the divorced category and one in the widowed category, they both were excluded. A t-test was used to compare the remaining two categories. Table 9 summarizes the means comparisons across all six scales for married and single participants ( $n=32$  and  $n=11$ , respectively). There were significant

differences between the two groups on the Psychological and Financial scales. For the Psychological scale, an independent-samples t-test indicated that means were significantly higher for married ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 0.4$ ) than for single ( $M = 3.8$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ),  $t(41) = -2.5$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . Similarly, the financial scale had a significant difference between the two groups. Independent-samples t-test indicated that means were significantly higher for married ( $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ) than for single ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ),  $t(41) = -2.1$ ,  $p = 0.04$ .

Since marital status had significant effects on students' responses concerning the psychological and financial aspects, it is important to know why married students are more affected by these variables. In this case, the face-to-face interviews provide insight into the cause of these effects. These are discussed in the face-to-face findings section.

Table 9. Marital Status Association with Students' Responses

Marital status	N	M	SD	DF	t-value	P-value
Personal						
Single	32	4.1	0.8	41	-1.6	0.1
Married	11	4.6	0.3			
Psychological						
Single	32	3.8	0.8	41	-2.5	0.01*
Married	11	4.5	0.4			
Faculty						
Single	32	3.5	0.6	41	-0.8	0.3
Married	11	3.7	0.6			
Engagement						
Single	32	3.4	0.7	13.1	-1.1	0.1
Married	11	3.7	1.0			
University Services						
Single	32	3.2	0.6	41	-0.8	0.4
Married	11	3.4	0.6			

Continued...						
Marital status	N	M	SD	DF	t-value	P-value
Financial						
Single	32	2.7	1.0	41	-2.1	0.04*
Married	11	3.4	1.0			

Note: for the Engagement scale, Levene's equality of variance assumption was violated, thus the alternative statistic is reported.

### ***Degree Major:***

As there was only 1 participant in the humanities and 2 participants in two other majors (chemistry and biology), they were excluded. A One-way ANOVA test was used to compare the remaining three majors. Table 10 shows the results of comparing the mean responses across all scales for those majoring in engineering, business, and medicine and health care (n=24, n=11, n=7, respectively). The result indicates that there were no statistically significant differences between group means for all scales (personal, psychological, faculty, engagement, services, and financial) as determined by one-way ANOVA [ $F(2,39) = 1.0, p = .3$ ;  $F(2,39) = 1.1, p = .3$ ;  $F(2,39) = 1.2, p = .3$ ;  $F(2,39) = 0.3, p = .7$ ;  $F(2,39) = 1.3, p = .2$ ; and  $F(2,39) = 1.2, p = .3$ ; respectively]. Therefore, the students from all three majors reported similar motivating factors for completing their degrees.

Table 10. Student Responses by Majors

Major	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
Personal						
Engineering	24	4.2	0.8	(2,39)	1.0	0.3
Business	11	4.5	0.3			
Medicine and health care	7	4.5	0.5			

Continued...						
Major	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
Psychological						
Engineering	24	3.9	0.8			
Business	11	4.3	0.9	(2,39)	1.1	0.3
Medicine and health care	7	4.2	0.7			
Faculty						
Engineering	24	3.5	0.6			
Business	11	3.8	0.7	(2,39)	1.2	0.3
Medicine and health care	7	3.8	0.8			
Engagement						
Engineering	24	3.5	0.8			
Business	11	3.5	0.7	(2,39)	0.3	0.7
Medicine and health care	7	3.2	0.8			
University Services						
Engineering	24	3.1	0.7			
Business	11	3.5	0.4	(2,39)	1.3	0.2
Medicine and health care	7	3.4	0.5			
Financial						
Engineering	24	2.8	1.0			
Business	11	2.8	1.0	(2,39)	1.2	0.3
Medicine and health care	7	3.5	1.1			

### ***Family Monthly Income:***

An ANOVA test was conducted to compare responses between participants with different parents' monthly incomes. Table 11 shows that the majority of participants fall in the <\$2000 and >\$8000 categories with ( $n=16$ ,  $n=16$ ) respectively. ANOVA indicated there were no statistically significant differences between group means for all scales (personal, psychological, faculty, engagement, services, and financial) with [ $F(3, 41) = 1.9$ ,  $p = .1$ ];  $F(3, 41) = 2.3$ ,  $p = .09$ ;

$F(3, 41) = 0.9, p = .4$ ;  $F(3, 41) = 0.7, p = .5$ ;  $F(3, 41) = 1.7, p = .1$ ; and  $F(3, 41) = 0.6, p = .6$  ;  
respectively].

Table 11. Monthly Income Group Comparison

Income	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
Personal						
< \$2000	16	3.9	1.1	(3, 41)	1.9	0.1
2000-\$4000	6	4.6	0.3			
4001-\$8000	7	4.4	0.4			
>\$8000	16	4.4	0.4			
Psychological						
< \$2000	16	3.7	0.9	(3, 41)	2.3	0.09
2000-\$4000	6	4.7	0.4			
4001-\$8000	7	4.1	0.6			
>\$8000	16	4.1	0.9			
Faculty						
< \$2000	16	3.4	0.7	(3, 41)	0.9	0.4
2000-\$4000	6	3.7	0.7			
4001-\$8000	7	3.8	0.6			
>\$8000	16	3.7	0.6			
Engagement						
< \$2000	16	3.3	0.6	(3, 41)	0.7	0.5
2000-\$4000	6	3.4	1.2			
4001-\$8000	7	3.8	0.7			
>\$8000	16	3.5	0.7			
University Services						
< \$2000	16	3.0	0.8	(3, 41)	1.7	0.1
2000-\$4000	6	3.3	0.4			
4001-\$8000	7	3.6	0.5			
>\$8000	16	3.3	0.6			

Continued...						
Income	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
Financial						
< \$2000	16	2.6	0.9	(3, 41)	0.6	0.6
2000-\$4000	6	3.0	1.3			
4001-\$8000	7	3.2	1.1			
>\$8000	16	2.9	1.1			

### ***Father Educational Status:***

Table 12 displays the results of the ANOVA conducted to evaluate whether significant scale response differences existed between students with fathers who had different educational histories. It is clear from the results that there is a significant effect of fathers' educational level on students' responses toward their completion of a bachelor's degree for the personal scale,  $F(5, 38)=2.97, p = 0.02$ .

Since ANOVA test does not inform which specific groups differed, post hoc tests were run to find where the differences occurred between the groups. Instead of using standard deviation (SD), standard error values for each group mean were presented. According to Howell (2012), it is right to use the standard deviation of each group, but standard error and confidence limits are also used in the post-hoc test. As seen in Table 13, post-hoc pairwise comparison shows that the difference arose from the Some College group ( $M = 3.1, p < .05$  for all groups) endorsing the personal scale significantly less than all other groups, i.e., Less than High School ( $M = 4.4, SE = 0.3$ ), High School/GED ( $M = 4.5, SE = 0.4$ ), Associate's Degree ( $M = 4.7, SD = 0.4$ ), Bachelor's Degree ( $M = 4.3, SE = 0.3$ ), and Advanced Degree ( $M = 4.43, SE = 0.5$ ). However, the other scales did not indicate any significant differences across groups,  $p's > 0.05$ .

Table 12. Mean Scale Responses Comparison by Educational Status of Father

Father education level	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
Personal						
Less than high school	5	4.4	0.1	(5, 38)	2.9	0.02*
High school/GED	9	4.5	0.3			
Some college	4	3.1	1.4			
2-year college degree	4	4.7	0.2			
4-year college degree	19	4.3	0.7			
Advanced degree	3	4.4	0.6			
Psychological						
Less than high school	5	4.4	0.5	(5,38)	0.9	0.5
High school/GED	9	4.1	0.9			
Some college	4	3.4	1.1			
2-year college degree	4	3.9	0.8			
4-year college degree	19	4.0	0.8			
Advanced degree	3	4.5	0.9			
Faculty						
Less than high school	5	3.7	0.3	(5,38)	0.7	0.6
High school/GED	9	3.4	0.9			
Some college	4	3.1	0.4			
2-year college degree	4	3.9	0.3			
4-year college degree	19	3.6	0.6			
Advanced degree	3	3.8	1.1			
Engagement						
Less than high school	5	3.4	0.7	(5,38)	0.4	0.8
High school/GED	9	3.6	0.8			
Some college	4	3.1	0.7			
2-year college degree	4	3.8	0.5			
4-year college degree	19	3.4	0.9			
Advanced degree	3	3.1	0.5			

Continued...						
Father education level	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
University Services						
Less than high school	5	2.8	0.7	(5,38)	1.8	0.1
High school/GED	9	3.5	0.5			
Some college	4	2.7	0.9			
2-year college degree	4	3.8	0.2			
4-year college degree	19	3.2	0.7			
Advanced degree	3	3.3	0.5			
Financial						
Less than high school	5	2.5	0.8	(5,38)	1.6	0.1
High school/GED	9	3.5	1.2			
Some college	4	2.6	0.8			
2-year college degree	4	3.5	0.7			
4-year college degree	19	2.6	0.9			
Advanced degree	3	3.3	0.8			

Table 13. Post-hoc Test for Some College Variable

Father Education Level	SE	P-Value
Some college variable		
Less than high school	0.3	0.007
High school/GED	0.4	0.002
2-year college degree	0.4	0.002
4-year college degree	0.3	0.002
Advanced degree	0.5	0.013

SE= Standard Error, and SE (some college) = 0.3

Note: all other variables were ignored because they were not significant.

### ***Mother Educational Status:***

For the level of mothers' education, the One-Way ANOVA test was conducted to compare mean responses across the six scales. Table 14 summarizes the findings of no significant difference in the mean responses across any scales,  $p\text{-value} > .05$ , (personal,

psychological, faculty, engagement, services, and financial) with [ $F(5, 38) = 0.5, p = .7$ ];  $F(5, 38) = 1.1, p = .3$ ;  $F(5, 38) = 0.2, p = .9$ ;  $F(5, 38) = 0.5, p = .7$ ;  $F(5, 38) = 0.8, p = .5$ ; and  $F(5, 35) = 0.4, p = .8$  ], respectively.

Therefore, the results seen in Table 12 and 13 show that fathers' education is relevant to students' completion but mothers' education is not. More details will be provided in the next chapter and discussion section.

Table 14. Mean Scale Responses Comparison by Educational Status of Mother

Mother education level	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
Personal						
Less than high school	10	4.2	0.5	(5,38)	0.5	0.7
High school/GED	7	4.0	1.3			
Some college	4	4.0	1.5			
2-year college degree	4	4.5	0.4			
4-year college degree	16	4.3	0.4			
Advanced degree	3	4.7	0.3			
Psychological						
Less than high school	10	4.0	1.0	(5,38)	1.1	0.3
High school/GED	7	4.3	0.5			
Some college	4	4.1	0.8			
2-year college degree	4	4.6	0.5			
4-year college degree	16	3.9	0.8			
Advanced degree	3	3.3	1.1			
Faculty						
Less than high school	10	3.7	0.4	(5,38)	0.2	0.9
High school/GED	7	3.5	0.8			
Some college	4	3.5	0.9			
2-year college degree	4	3.5	0.6			
4-year college degree	16	3.6	0.7			
Advanced degree	3	3.2	1.0			

Continued...						
Mother education level	N	M	SD	DF	F-value	P-value
Engagement						
Less than high school	10	3.4	0.8	(5,38)	0.5	0.7
High school/GED	7	3.7	0.5			
Some college	4	3.4	0.9			
2-year college degree	4	3.6	0.8			
4-year college degree	16	3.2	0.8			
Advanced degree	3	3.8	1.3			
University Services						
Less than high school	10	3.1	0.7	(5,38)	0.8	0.5
High school/GED	7	3.3	0.6			
Some college	4	3.3	0.8			
2-year college degree	4	3.1	0.5			
4-year college degree	16	3.2	0.8			
Advanced degree	3	3.9	0.2			
Financial						
Less than high school	10	2.7	0.9	(5,38)	0.4	0.8
High school/GED	7	3.3	1.1			
Some college	4	3.2	1.3			
2-year college degree	4	2.5	1.0			
4-year college degree	16	2.9	1.0			
Advanced degree	3	3.0	0.9			

### ***Father's Employment Status:***

Table 15 shows that 14 of the participants' fathers were not employed and that 31 were employed. The independent *t*-tests identified no significant differences between the two groups across all six scales, *p*'s > 0.05 indicating that students' father's employment status was not a significant differentiating variable for reported motivating factor responses. As a result, fathers' job did not affect students' persistence to complete their degree.

Table 15. Scale Responses by Father's Employment Status

Variable (father work)	N	M	SD	DF	t value	p-value
Personal						
No	14	4.5	0.3	43	1.5	0.1
Yes	31	4.1	0.8			
Psychological						
No	14	4.1	0.9	43	0.6	0.5
Yes	31	4.0	0.8			
Faculty						
No	14	3.8	0.7	43	1.4	0.2
Yes	31	3.5	0.6			
Engagement						
No	14	3.2	0.8	43	-1.6	0.1
Yes	31	3.6	0.7			
University Services						
No	14	3.2	0.8	43	-0.2	0.8
Yes	31	3.3	0.6			
Financial						
No	14	3.1	1.0	43	0.8	0.4
Yes	31	2.8	1.0			

***Mother's Employment Status:***

Table 16 summarizes the results of scale response mean comparisons between the 31 participants with unemployed mothers and the 14 students with employed mothers.

Independent *t*-test did not identify significant response differences between the two groups across any of the six scales,  $p's > 0.05$ . Therefore, mother's employment status did not affect the participants to complete their degree.

Table 16. Scale Responses by Mother's Employment Status

Variable (mother work)	N	M	SD	DF	t value	p-value
Personal						
No	31	4.2	0.8	43	-1.1	0.2
Yes	14	4.5	0.3			
Psychological						
No	31	4.1	0.9	43	1.1	0.2
Yes	14	3.8	0.8			
Faculty						
No	31	3.6	0.6	43	0.8	0.4
Yes	14	3.5	0.6			
Engagement						
No	31	3.5	0.7	43	0.1	0.9
Yes	14	3.4	0.8			
University Services						
No	31	3.2	0.7	43	-0.9	0.3
Yes	14	3.4	0.6			
Financial						
No	31	3.0	1.0	43	0.5	0.6
Yes	14	2.8	1.0			

### Summary of the Survey Results:

Survey results provided a clear description as to the patterns of factors affecting Saudi students and the completion of their degree. Findings indicated that both the personal and psychological scales occupied the two highest percentages across all scales respectively. Conversely, the financial scale scored the lowest percentage.

The Personal and Psychological scales were the highest endorsed ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ;  $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ , respectively), indicating that participants found these associated items as the

most relevant motivating factors for completion of their bachelor's degree. With regard to the Personal scale, these items (ambition, prospective career, improving skills, priding of the degree, GPA, and English proficiency, and students' skills and preparedness) relate to completion of a bachelor's degree. In other words, students would complete in order to gain a better prospective career or attain a better social standing (social class) among their society. Having goals and ambitions, as well as valuing education, contribute to these students' perceived success and their resultant continuance within universities. In addition, academic achievement (GPA) and students' skills in English language and courses were effective for the student to complete their degree.

With regard to the Psychology scale, self-efficacy and self-esteem also contribute to these students' success and completion. The participants considered their high self-efficacy and self-esteem as elemental in their successful completion. One might interpret this finding to mean that a feeling of self-efficacy could reduce a student's stress in so far as they have an unshakeable confidence in their academic ability and preparedness. In addition, academic skills and level of achievement are personal factors that affect students psychologically. When a student carries a high GPA, he/she might feel more adjusted academically, and the likelihood of dropout likely decreases.

These students may give preference to the Personal and Psychological factors over the other scales precisely because they left their country and native cultures seeking a better quality of education, one that meets their ambition and interest. For example, Personal factors are more efficacious than Financial factors because these students emanate from a country

where education is free-of-charge. Therefore, they came here not due to the financial support, but rather to meet their personal goals.

As an institutional factor, the Faculty scale came as the third highest rated factor ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) affecting the participants motivation to complete their bachelor's degree in the United States. The participants provided positive responses toward their interaction with their faculty and advisors. Quality of communication with faculty, knowledgeable professor, advisor flexibility, good interaction with professor inside the class, considering student absence, and assignment provided to the students could affect the participants completion of their degree.

One interpretation is that when students experience quality interaction with their faculty, they presumably are better able to be more adjusted socially and academically. Moreover, this interaction can take place inside or outside of the classroom through in-person interaction or after-hours office time, among other opportunities. Considering students' challenges and circumstances may help enhance this interaction time. Students might be hesitant to interact with faculty beyond the classroom setting for any number of reasons. As a result, the faculty should consider initiating contact in order to bridge this communication gap with students.

Similarly, academic advising and flexibility could pave the way for students to complete their degree in a specified order and timely fashion. In other words, with the advisor's guidance, the student stays on track in order to graduate on time. Additionally, the advisor's role might expand to identify solutions to students' academic troubles. The high endorsement of this factor suggests that lack of academic advising may increase dropout rates, particularly

with international students who need more considerations than their American counterparts. The face-to-face interviews (see the next section) further clarify this hypothesis.

The Engagement scale followed the Faculty scale as the next highest endorsed factor affecting the participants in completing their bachelor's degree. As the survey items included, good communication with students in the class, interaction with classmates inside and outside the classroom and the campus, classmates help with assignments and problems, and engagement with American and Saudi students were related to Saudi students to complete their degree.

To expand on this explanation, student engagement could be inside or outside of the classroom, and it could also be affected because of culture differences. Student engagement in the classroom occurs through interacting with classmates. Consequently, this offers the opportunity to enhance the student's adjustment, which eventually might increase the retention rate. Moreover, the students would presumably feel more engaged outside of the classroom through experiencing equal treatment when compared to their American counterparts. Given the similar mean endorsement values for the Engagement scale and the Faculty scale, potential differences in relative importance between contributing aspects of each factor was investigated via face-to-face interviews (discussed in the next section). As students from different cultures and races, it is often difficult for them to adjust, which increases the need to focus on this issue in the second stage of the analysis.

The University Services scale's mean endorsement was a value of 3.25 ( $SD= 0.68$ ). This value suggests a near neutrality in the participant's opinion of the importance of the associated

items with regard to completing their Bachelor's degree. This does not mean the participants have doubts about university services, but rather that a small sample size may not produce an accurate result (Wisz et al., 2008). As a result, participants did not provide neither higher nor lower satisfaction with writing center, counselor help, campus community, university cultural activities, athletic and recreation activities.

The Universities Services factor includes any academic and social services provided by the institution of higher learning. As a way to overcome such academic challenges, students leverage such services as counseling, the writing center, tutoring, etc. In addition, offering some entertainment facilities and activities could enhance retention rates. The face-to face interviews provide rich information about this scale.

The Financial scale had a mean of 2.90 ( $SD = 1.02$ ), occupying the lowest mean across all scales. Thus, covering book and class material, rent, food, transportation, and child care did not score a high mean for the participants to complete their degree in the United States. The reason for this low mean might be because these students came from a country where education and medical services are free-of-charge. Therefore, they left their country and continue to seek a better quality of education in which they can accomplish their personal goals and ambitions. Since all of the participants have a scholarship with paid tuition, medical insurance, and living expenses, they might not experience any financial difficulties that increase their awareness of the value of financial support.

After testing the main effects of demographic variables, the results also indicated significant differences between married and single participants in regard to the Psychological

and Financial scale. For the Psychological scale, means were significantly higher for married couples ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 0.4$ ) than for singles ( $M = 3.8$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ ). married students had higher mean of both self-efficacy and esteem than single students.

Married students might feel a greater sense of self-efficacy and esteem than single students. In addition, there was a significant influence of Marital Status on the Financial scale in favor of married participants ( $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ;  $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ). Since married students have greater interests and obligations than singles, it is clear that the married participants lend more emphases on financial support than single participants in order to complete their degree in U.S. universities.

In the same manner, the ANOVA test of the demographic variables showed a significant effect of Fathers' Educational Level on students' responses toward their completion of a bachelor's degree for the personal scale. Specifically, the results indicated that students whose fathers had completed 2-year college degrees were more positive about the Personal factors affecting their college retention in the United States. Therefore, students whose fathers completed 2-year college degrees would complete their degree because they give more considerations to their ambition, prospective career, improving skills, pride of completing the degree, English proficiency, and their skills and academic preparedness. As seen in the results, a father's education is associated with students' motivation for degree completion but a mother's education is not. So, if the fathers had a degree, their sons or daughters would tend to be motivated toward completing a degree like them. Conversely, students whose fathers did not complete might have motivation or ambition to complete. Additional elaboration on

potential reasons for this finding will be provided in the discussion chapter, integrate findings from the face-to-face interviews.

## **Second: Face-to-Face Findings**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I present the materials from the face-to-face interview with a sub-sample of 10 participants. The purpose of this interview was to collect additional information related to the survey findings of the larger sample. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews ranged from 50 minutes to one hour. The researcher coded the interviews' transcripts and identified the themes of importance based on the survey analysis.

In this analysis, I found five important themes related to the survey variables. The five themes are as follows:

#### **Theme 1: Personal and Psychological Factors**

- a) Personal factors
- b) Academic achievement and insistence.

#### **Theme 2: Institutional Factors**

- a) University services and resources
- b) Faculty interaction

#### **Theme 3: Social and Academic Integration (Engagement)**

- a) University community

#### **Theme 4: Cultural Considerations**

#### **Theme 5: Financial Influence**

## **The Storytellers:**

**Misa:** Misa is 23-year-old female specializing in biomedical engineering at the Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE). She is single and lives with her family on an income of less than \$2,000 per month. In the United States, she lives with her father with a monthly stipend of \$3,342 for both. Misa did not specifically state her GPA, but she said it is above average. She began pursuing her bachelor's degree since the spring of 2012. Before she came to the United States she attended a Saudi university studying interior design, which she later quit. She traveled to the United States seeking a unique program that would satisfy her ambition. Both her mother's and father's education level are less than high school; and only her mother works.

**Abdul:** Abdul is a single male student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a GPA of 3.2. He studies mechanical engineering and has done so since 2012. He used to attend the industrial college (courses instructions are in English) in Saudi Arabia but he left the university because of difficulties with the English language. Abdul gained his high school diploma from a public school with a substandard teaching method as stated by himself. He said that, "There was no attention from the teachers to their students. We were living as if we were in a break." He has gained support from his father to complete the bachelor's degree in the United States. Both his father's and mother's educational level are below high school level. Only his father works in a mineral company and earns higher than \$8,000 per month. He receives from the government a monthly stipend of \$1,847. He lives with two Saudi students in an apartment close to the university campus.

**Fadi:** Fadi is a male student at Cardinal Stritch University. He has been an accounting major since 2012. He is 24 years old and single. This is his first experience studying at a university. His GPA is 3.2. He is passionately involved sports such as soccer and basketball. He used to work at a fitness gym. He makes a point to participate in sport activities in the university. During his tenure in the United States, he has lived exclusively with Americans. His mother's educational level is a bachelor's degree; whereas his father did not graduate from high school. Both parents have jobs and their monthly income is considered average in Saudi Arabia. His monthly stipend is \$1,847.

**Rian:** Rian is a male student attending the Milwaukee School of Engineering. He studies computer engineering and his GPA is above average. He is 28 years old, and married with two kids. He used to work as a technician in Saudi electricity company, but because he did not like his work situation, he decided to pursue his education in engineering in order to improve his career status. His mother finished advanced educational level and his father has a bachelor's degree. His father works as a detective and his mother is a school principal. As he stated, the monthly income of his parents is modest, but above average. For his income in the United States, he receives \$3,882 as a monthly stipend for him and his family. He resides with his family in an apartment located in the Downton.

**Amina:** Amina is a female student attending the university of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, specializing in industrial engineering. She has studied there since 2013. She is 27 and single. Prior to coming to the United States, she attended a university in Holland but was not able to complete a degree there. Both her mother and father reached a high school level of education.

Only her father works, and her family income is less than \$2,000 per month. She lives in Milwaukee, the state of Wisconsin with her father with a monthly stipend of \$3,342.

**Majeed:** Majeed is a male student at the Milwaukee School of Engineering, specializing in industrial engineering. He is 23 years old and single. His GPA is 3.5. He completed secondary school in Saudi Arabia and then enrolled at MSOE. Both his father and mother have a bachelor's degree. Only his mother works, and his total parents' income in Saudi Arabia is higher than \$8,000 USD. He said that "My economic status is from the average to above the average." Majeed attended a private secondary school where he gained high scores in the qualifying exams that enables a student to be admitted into Saudi universities with any major he or she prefers, but opted for MSOE at the end. He lives with two Saudi friends in an apartment close to the MSOE campus.

**Sammia:** Sammia is a 25-year-old woman attending Cardinal Stritch University and majoring in nursing. She is married and has one boy. Sammia attended a nursing college in Saudi Arabia, but she did not continue because of the following reason, "I studied nursing for about a year and a half in Saudi Arabia, and then we did the practical part while we were not qualified yet to work with patients, which made me very upset." When Sammia came to the United States in 2012, she studied nursing at the Milwaukee School of Engineering but because of its quarter system, she then transferred to Cardinal Strich University. She has a high GPA (3.5). Her mother earned an associate's degree (two-year degree), whereas her father did not complete secondary education. Both her mother and father are unemployed and their monthly income is between \$2,000 to \$4,000 dollars. Her father makes this income from involving in

such special businesses. Sammia lives with her husband and son with a total income of \$3,612 per month.

**Bader:** Bader is a male student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and his major is information technology management. He is 23 years old and single. His GPA is 3.6. Regarding his parents' income, it is more than \$8,000 per month. His father completed a high school education and he currently works at a Saudi embassy. However, his mother's educational level is less than high school and she is a housewife. He receives from the government a monthly stipend of \$1,847. He lives with two Saudi students in an apartment close to the university campus.

**Mussa:** Mussa is 24 years old and single. He studies architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His GPA is relatively high (3.5). He used to study at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia for a year, but he did not continue because educational system in the Kingdom did not clearly map out a path for him. He did not feel comfortable and decided to study abroad. Both of his parents are unemployed and they did not complete a high school education. Yet, their net monthly income is more than \$8,000. His father makes this income through working in such business as real estates and furniture manufacturing. Mussa receives from the Saudi Arabia government a monthly stipend of \$1,847. He lives alone in apartment located in the Milwaukee downtown.

**Hannof:** Hannof is a single female student. She is 23 years old and she is majoring in public relations. She studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). The educational level of her mother and father is less than high school and they are not currently employed. Her

family income comes from a brother support and it averages between \$2,000 to \$4,000 per month. She lives in the United States with her brother with a stipend of \$3,342 per month.

Tables 17-18 provide a brief preview about the participants' information and demographic variable.

Table 17. Student Participants Profile

Participant	Gender	Age	Social Status	University	Major	GPA
Misa	23	Female	Single	Milwaukee School of Engineering	Biomedical Engineering	On Average
Abdul	23	Male	Married	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Mechanical Engineering	3.4
Fadi	24	Male	Single	Cardinal Stritch University	Business (Accounting)	3.2
Rian	28	Male	Married	Milwaukee School of Engineering	Computer Engineering	Above Average
Amina	27	Female	Single	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Industrial Engineering	NI
Majeed	23	Male	Single	Milwaukee School of Engineering	Industrial Engineering	3.5
Sammia	25	Female	Married	Cardinal Stritch University	Nursing	3.5

Continued...						
Participant	Gender	Age	Social Status	University	Major	GPA
Bader	23	Male	Single	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Information technology management	3.6
Mussa	24	Male	Single	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Architecture	3.5
Hannof	23	Female	Single	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Public Relations	NI

Note: NI = no information

Table 18. Participants' Family Profile

Family Information	Family Income	Father Education	Mother Education	Father Work	Mother work
Misa	<\$2000	Less than high school	Less than high school	No	Yes
Abdul	>\$8000	High School/GED	High School/GED	Yes	No
Fadi	\$2000-\$4000	Less than High School	4-Year College Degree (Bachelors)	Yes	Yes
Rian	>\$8000	4-Year College Degree (Bachelors)	Advanced Degree	Yes	Yes
Amina	<\$2000	High School/GED (general education)	High School/GED (general education)	Yes	No

Continued...					
Family Information	Family Income	Father Education	Mother Education	Father Work	Mother work
Majeed	>\$8000	4-Year College Degree (Bachelors)	4-Year College Degree (Bachelors)	No	Yes
Sammia	\$2000-\$4000	Less than High School	Some College	Yes	No
Bader	>\$8000	High School/GED	Less than High School	Yes	No
Mussa	>\$8000	Less than High School	Less than High School	No	No
Hanoof	<\$2000	Less than High School	Less than High School	No	No

### Theme 1: Personal and Psychological Factors

The majority of literature conceptualizes both personal and psychological scales under one measure which is psychological scale. However, this study initially made these two scales separate in the survey instrument, then it engaged them under one theme in the face-to-face analysis. The goal of that separation was to make sure that the participants differentiate between their inner feeling (psychological) and outer strength that guides them to complete their bachelor's degree in the United States.

For the theme of this study, the researcher looked at the personal and psychological influences on students' persistence in order to complete their bachelor's degree in the U.S. As the survey results indicated that the Personal and Psychological scale had the highest average of the factors affecting Saudi students to complete their bachelor's degree in the U.S., the face-

to-face interview provided more information about this result. For participants, parents' desires, student ambition and goals, better jobs, educational value, academic achievement and self-efficacy were the most often repeated responses as important factors for completing college. Nevertheless, the students had slightly different perspectives and experiences concerning their persistence in the United States.

**a) Personal factors:**

***Family desire:*** Parents' desire is essential to the success of Saudi students at Milwaukee universities. In this study, all of the participants stated that their parents' ambition (meaning their desire to see their child succeed) is an important factor for them to complete their bachelor's degree. For example, Abdul wants to fulfill his father's dream by gaining a bachelor's degree, emphasizing that that was the most important motivating force that enabled his persistence to achieve the degree. He stated that:

The major goal that pushes me to obtain the bachelor's degree is to make my father's dream come true honestly. My father is not educated, meaning educationally, he does not have a degree. The highest level of education that he got was high school, and his dream is that I get a degree... So, my father decided that I have to travel to America, and he completed my paperwork for the university. I did not like the idea, but he forced me to travel and study abroad in America. Then I said OK, as long as my father thinks America is the best, I will go with his opinion.

Therefore, Abdul has worked diligently in order to make superior grades and attain the degree. His desire to live out his father's dreams for him has pushed him to continue. He emphasized that, "I was scared of going back to my father without having the degree that he wants. So, this encouraged me to work hard."

As a reason to satisfy her parents, Sammia wanted to fulfill her mother's dream of her achieving a degree. She said that:

I consider a bachelor's degree as an important thing. It was my dream to grow up and get a bachelor's degree, but now I want to earn the bachelor's degree because my mother could not earn her bachelor's degree. So I am trying to make it up for her by earning the degree. The strongest motivator to pursue my education is my mother. I want to make up what she could not do for herself.

Fadi's experience was similar to Abdul's and Sammia's concerning satisfying their parents' wishes. However, Fadi's situation differed slightly. Since Fadi's parents have a bachelor's degree, his personal bar was higher. He commented:

I came from an educated family. When it comes to my family and uncles, all of them are educated. So, a bachelor's degree you can say it is an important thing, meaning even a two-years degree would not satisfy my parents or would not satisfy my society.

Similarly, Majeed stated that:

My father and mother are all university graduates, as well as my older siblings are university graduates, so I do not want to be the one with the lowest level of education in the family. So, my family gave me the motivation to pursue my education and to get the bachelor's degree...my father kept saying that this is an opportunity that cannot be missed that you go to another country and get a degree and then come back. This builds your personality, it helps to build your personality, and it teaches you how to be independent.

The educational level of Majeed's family was an influential factor in completing his education. He asserted that he wanted to be on the same level of his family's education. In addition, Majeed's statement about his father indicates his father's desire to maximize this

opportunity to study abroad, emphasizing such benefits as developing character and achieving both personal and financial independence.

Amina considered leaving the school could be due to the lack of parent's support and advices. However, her family was against her decision, forcing her to complete her education in Milwaukee (family cohesion is very important for Saudis). They provided for her all the assistance needed to set her to complete her degree as financial and psychological supports. Regarding quitting school, her father emphatically told her, "[d]o not ever think about it." She then commented:

They are very against the idea that I quit the university. So, they are with the idea that I complete my education. They mentioned that 'It is your life, your future, and if you do not complete your education, you will lose your future.' My parents are aware that education is the future. They also motivate my sister who has been a graduate from high school for 10 years to go and study something. They tell her to get Diploma or anything.

Bader concurred stating that:

My father and mother encouraged and supported me to travel and study abroad. In fact, it was their desire that I study abroad rather than my desire. When my father came to me and encouraged me to travel, his major goal was that I would become the first of his sons who will get the degree. This situation made me to think about it a little bit.

He asserted that the main goal for him to pursue his education in the United States was not his desire, but rather the goals his father set for him. Through all these statements, participants' responses emphasized the main influence of their parents in pushing them to get their bachelor's degree for their ultimate educational and occupational success.

***Student's ambition and goals:*** Most participants discussed their ambitions and goals in completing their bachelor's degree. Misa views getting the degree as a major accomplishment. She remarked that:

Studying abroad generally was a dream since I was in the middle school. I used to tell my parents that 'if I graduate from high school, I will study abroad.' Obtaining my bachelor's degree is the first step in order to achieve my future dreams and ambitions...It is my strong desire. I like to try something new...The major that I wanted was not offered in Saudi Arabia.

As Misa mentioned, her dream to study something different from majors offered in Saudi Arabia was an important reason for her. In the same way, Rian was strongly perseverant in completing his bachelor's degree. He stated that nothing will stop him to complete his degree, even if he failed in a class. "I will never give up, even if anything happens to me. Whether if I failed a class or I passed a class." He considers any obstacle that he may face as an encouraging challenge to attain his goal. He stated that:

Completing my education is my goal, and I have to accomplish it. This is my major goal, so of course I will be a little bit upset if I earn a bad grade, but it will not prevent me from pursuing my education. In fact, it may encourage me to work harder and earn higher grades in the next courses.

According to Majeed, "It is a personal ambition to complete my education and get a bachelor's degree in engineering." He then talked about how a student succeeds in completing his education, emphasizing that identifying the goal is the key to be successful. He commented,

Before I start doing anything, I put the goals, the goals for myself, the targets that I want to reach at the end of the time period like the quarter (semester) or a year or the time

that I put for myself. So, if I reach what I want, and that I can put check points on the things that I achieved, then I consider myself that I succeeded.

Therefore, students' ambitions and goals shape their persistence. With ambition, students set the priority for their goals rather than playing the role of passive participants swayed by circumstances that they may face while studying in the university.

**Better jobs:** Beside parents' desire and students' ambition, most participants gave high priority to their future as a reason for completing their degree in the U.S. Future career prospects was an important factor for them in seeking their degree in America. Here, the students provide their views on the importance of completing the degree. Accordingly, Fadi stated that, "It is the only key in order to get a good job." He asserted that a bachelor's degree ensures a higher position of employment.

Even those who got a job with a two-year or a three-year experience, they could not be promoted until they get their bachelor's degree or a master's degree. I think the bachelor's degree these days is the only key for you to get into the Labor Market and to get a job that would help you to accomplish your dreams.

Similarly, before coming to the United States, Rian used to work as a technician in an electrical company. He shared his experiences and mentioned the value of having a bachelor's degree. Not only did he suffer from bad treatment in the job, but his salary was low as well. He asserted that:

If I work with my bachelor's degree, I will get the job that I want. Bachelor's degree will bring me the salary that I want... In my experience in the labor field, the treatment of the technicians was bad compared to the treatment of the engineers...If I become an engineer, of course my social status will improve among other engineers in any

company. The financial status will be better and my life with my family will be better. Approximately, money is considered one of the most important things. Meaning if you have money, you will be happy.

Abdul linked obtaining better career to English proficiency. Many employers in Saudi Arabia require English the language, so that was the prime motivating force for study in America. He mentioned his experience with a school he quit in Saudi Arabia. He came here to improve his language skills which may facilitate a better career for his future. He stated:

I got good grades in mathematics and chemistry, but unfortunately I did not pass the English exam. So my father's view was that as long as I did not pass the English exam, I would not be successful in my life because English is the common language in Saudi Arabia when it comes to getting a job or something like that.

According to Majeed:

We always see that the graduates, especially from the United States when they come back to Saudi Arabia and work in government or in companies, they will have a priority over other students and other employees. They know what they want. Meaning, the American university teaches you what will be required from you in the Labor Market.

Majeed mentioned that employers in Saudi Arabia know about the skills learned in American universities. Employers believe that a student who graduates from an American university is more qualified than others. As a result, he came here in order to get a quality education that provides him with superior qualifications.

Mussa agrees with Majeed that American education provides access to better jobs. Employers give priority to applicants with a bachelor's degree from known and strong universities. He commented:

Getting a university degree from America, especially in this university where architecture is very strong for it is considered one of the top 20 programs nationally... so this was one of the strongest motives that encouraged me to study here in America, majoring in architectural engineering in this university. This will give me a strong push forward if I get a degree from this university. And when I go back to my country, I will have a big chance to get the job that I want to get.

As a result, most students agreed that a college degree is often a necessary requirement for them to get started in their professional careers. Gaining a bachelor's degree can lead to an array of opportunities, including high paying jobs.

**Education value:** The majority of participants agreed in the key importance of a quality education. They discussed how education is vital and plays a key role in human, social, and economic development. Abdul mentioned the value of a bachelor's degree in society:

It gives you a good status in society when you are an educated person. You are seen as a knowledgeable person among your friends and family members. People think of you in a good way when you are an educated person. A person with an education may have better life experiences.

Abdul believes that an education and a bachelor's degree in particular, change the whole life of a person for the better. It helps individuals improve their thinking and gain a better position in society. It also better prepares them for life. He then added an important, but perhaps unstated value of education, "It taught me to be independent." Through education, an individual can develop or create a better personality in order to be more independent.

Misa agrees with Abdul that education improves the way an individual can collect, analyze, and then apply information. She added that it could also teach her how to be a successful mother, employee, and wife. She said:

Ranging on the job, from being a successful wife and a successful mother because education is an important thing, especially in these days and time. I expect that education or a university degree is an important thing for a boy or a girl. You will improve the way you think and you will see a lot of things. I wanted to see something new through education.

Similarly, Hanoof believes that education helps her to be independent. She noted, "If the person is not educated, he will not force himself to move away from his family and from his country." She also noted that education places an individual in a better social position. Furthermore, she reported that, "Level of education gives you a status as a person in any society whether an Arab or a Western society."

Mussa, also, linked level of education to the way an individual thinks and how people can determine his/her educational level thorough forms of communicating and behaving. He reported that:

Society takes for granted those people who do not pursue their education or thinks of that person as being unsuccessful or lazy, and this may adversely impact other aspects in his life. Even if he wants to sit and talk with people, they will think or know him as a person who does not have a bachelor's degree.

Sammia shared some common points with other respondents, but she distinctively added that educational quality is paramount for her. An effective and valuable education is the

process that develops her skills in order to be productive in society. She said that, “I studied nursing for about a year and a half in Saudi Arabia, and then we did the practical part when we were not qualified yet to work with patients.” On account of that, she left a Saudi university and came to the United States. She commented, “I have to study well. I do not want to reach a level where I go and work with a patient without understanding anything. And this thing is what made me so upset in Saudi Arabia.”

**b) Academic Achievement and Insistence:**

Students provide a clear picture of how their preparedness and academic achievement contribute to their academic success and persistence. They discussed how their pre-college background many times worked as an obstacle for their academic achievement. Even though they are less prepared for American universities, having a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem contribute to their success. Thus, through hard work and punctuality in classes, students can achieve positive results and even overcome the difficulties of their prior life experiences. Pre-college experience, student achievement and GPA, hard work, and punctuality coalesce to constitute a student’s insistence to complete his or her bachelor’s degree.

***Pre-college experience (preparedness):*** The educational system in Saudi Arabia differs from the United States. Saudi nationals are not well prepared for the higher educational system in the United States. Even though all participants had high GPAs while in high school and college, they all admitted to not being prepared enough for college work in the U.S. They claimed that not being adequately prepared for college courses was a barrier they struggled with. For all three universities, the participants had similar views.

Misa compared her struggle in understanding the courses taught at the university in relation to American students. Since she lacks some background knowledge in some courses, it is difficult for her to grasp the information as fast as American students do. She stated that, “American students can grasp the information immediately, and they understand the material right away because I feel that there are many students who had experience before they got into the university.” She takes longer time than an American to understand any given subject. “Americans acquire the information or learn it in a faster way,” she opined.

Bader concurred, saying, “The most difficult thing is when the professor explains an advanced thing, something that is not basic.” He brought this perspective when he struggles because of less preparation, “This was the most difficult thing that I was facing.” Fadi added his own problem with classes in economics:

There are some classes in which the students have more background than me. I felt that was unfair for me because other students have a background on the topic from their high school. For example, they took economics in high school, and then they studied them again in the university. So, I remember that the professor was not talking too much about the details. Meaning, he used to talk to us, and he expected us to have background knowledge. So, I was struggling in that class. It was in my second semester in the university and it was really annoying me.

For Fadi, the educational system in Saudi Arabia is substantially different from the United States. For instance, classes in economics were not even taught in Saudi high schools. In the same fashion, Rian commented:

I have never seen a programming language in my life. I remember in my first programming class, I was looking at the professor who was writing the code, and I was

looking at him as if he was writing something in Chinese on the board. I was shocked. But all the American students who were with me had studied that thing in high school. All of them had the background on what the professor was talking... It was a very hard thing for me. It required that I study a lot outside the university time. It required extra time from me as opposed to the American students who had a background. Unfortunately, we do not have anything in Saudi Arabia that teaches the coding until you get into the university and enroll in a specific major.

Abdul emphasized that as Saudi students are less prepared than Americans, they are also required to take prerequisite courses in order to prepare them for the main required courses. He said:

I lived in a dorm with an American student who was in mechanical engineering and I am in mechanical engineering too. I started with mathematics 90, 95, 105, 116, and 117, until I reached Calculus 1. The American student got into the university with Calculus 3 immediately. He was prepared from high school that he will be an engineering student, so they taught him Calculus 1 and Calculus 2, which are mathematics courses in high school.

Not only does less preparation affect students' understanding, but it also forces them to take a longer time and additional semesters to graduate. Abdul discussed how American students graduate faster than Saudi students because of the prerequisite courses and credits not transferable from Saudi Arabia. He commented, "Americans are supposed to finish 128 credit hours in the university, but he got into the university with some credit hours already taken before he got into the university as you can say it was like an evaluation."

Mussa, in his architecture major, faced a course that required a lot of background knowledge. His American peers had already outpaced him from the onset. He had this to say:

I think there is a gap between me and the American students because the programs that we use on the computer, the American students started to use them when they were in high school... They used to take courses and training sessions on these, like the drawing programs, the designing programs, all of these programs in the computer. But for me, when I was in high school, I did not acquire any of the designing skills nor any of the drawing skills.

***Student achievement and GPA versus language:*** Regardless of the fact that participants were less-prepared for college, their circumstances (whether educational or financial) did not ultimately hinder them in achieving academically. With ambition, self-efficacy, and persistence, they reported overcoming these challenges even if they have language deficiencies. In other words, language was a barrier for Saudis' academic achievement, but with self-efficacy and hard work they could overcome that barrier. Majeed stated that, "I had some problems in the English classes and in the general courses, so it affected my grades a lot." He then clarified that, "I can do better in a course in which I got a low grade."

With self-efficacy, Majeed feels optimistic that he can achieve well despite the challenge that he may face. Since he believes that he is capable to perform well, that means he can overcome this obstacle in which the degree of anxiety might decrease. As a result, a goal can be accomplished with the determination to succeed.

By the same token, Fadi explained that language deficiency does not stop a student to persist or complete the bachelor's degree. Rather, it can result in a higher level of focus and determination. As a student can feel able to overcome this challenge, he/she can achieve that. He stated that:

English is not that of a big barrier, but having an average level of English and doing well in your classes, you can graduate and get your bachelor's degree. I am talking from the reality that I have with two friends. One student was weak in English and now has an average level of English. He will graduate this semester. And that the one stronger in English will not graduate and has a lower GPA. I think the important thing is doing well in the classes along with a good level of English.

Rian concurred that language can affect a student's GPA in the first year. However, students can overcome this deficiency over time. Thus, students need to take more time to adapt to the university environment. He meant that in the beginning:

The student is shocked that the language is more difficult than what he learnt in the English language institute. So, the GPA starts to drop in the first year until the student gets used to the situation. The issue can be resolved with time only. The problem with the students is that if they face a difficulty at the beginning, they drop out. But if the student gives himself time to adapt with the situation, he will see that is very easy and he can overcome all of the obstacles.

Although language was not a barrier for some participants for their academic success and persistence, grades and GPA remained barriers. Academic achievement contributes to decrease the degree of anxiety in which an individual can be more confident. For Majeed, grades and GPA were a crucial factor for his completion. He asserted that, "The high grades, of course, encourage me to continue, and they give me confidence in myself that I can continue, especially if it is a course for my major."

Sammia emphasized that, "If the grade is low, and I do not find someone to help, I may then say I will not be able to pass the classes and I may drop the class and not continue." For her, success was related to GPA. "Success is related to GPA because it shows that you did not

put a lot of effort. You did not give all of your attention and care to increase your GPA or earn a high grade,” she argued.

In the same manner, Mussa concluded that high grades reflect on the students’ confidence. “When I get a high grade like an A makes me happy, and it makes me more determinant. It also makes me more productive in my studying and in my academic life,” he reported. He added that a low GPA puts students under pressure which may affect them psychologically.

When I get a low GPA in a specific semester, I feel that I am under pressure in the next term in order to improve my low performance in the previous term. But when I get a high GPA, this makes me comfortable, and when the next term comes, I feel that I am emotionally comfortable. A high GPA puts me on the safe side...meaning my affairs go well in studying.

In contrast, three participants clarified that a less than satisfactory GPA does not prevent them from earning a bachelor’s degree. That could be because these students have a higher degree of self-efficacy and self-esteem, in which they determine to accomplish their goals regardless of any barriers that may hinder them. According to Fadi, “I was not scared that I would drop out from the university or GPA may affect me.” Rian highlighted:

I have to pursue my education...Of course I will be a little bit upset if I earn a bad grade, but it will not prevent me to pursue my education. In fact, it may encourage me a lot to work harder and earn higher grades in the next courses.

Rian considered his lower grades as added motivation for him to do better in the forthcoming semesters. In addition, Hanoof resolved that there is nothing to stop her from completing her degree. She articulated:

In the beginning, my performance was very bad and I was warned to just leave the university.... Circumstances affected me a lot, but I overcame it and my GPA went up. Lower GPA does not mean that I drop out from the university because I honestly passed through many problems to come to here, so there is nothing that, other than if God wants.

## **Theme 2: Institutional Factors**

The survey results did not show high average endorsement for the influence of institutional factors (university services and faculty interaction) on participant persistence in American universities. In contrast, the interview analysis suggested that these two factors were the most important for Saudi students to complete their degree in the United States.

### **a) University Services and Resources:**

All participants reported the importance of colleges resources, services, and activities in completing their degree as well as improving their achievement. Majeed stated that, “The services offered in the university are really excellent like the library, the books, the databases, the physical books or the online books, the extracurricular activities like the activities outside the class, the recreation center, and the gym.”

***Academic support services:*** Three main services preferred and utilized by the participants in the three universities, were: tutoring or academic center, writing center, and library resources. Students often take advantage of these services when they have academic problems or simply desire to be in a good environment for which to study. Regarding tutoring services, Misa mentioned her frequent use of the tutoring center. She said that, “The courses that I could not understand right away, I went to the tutoring to save my time and my effort.”

Sammia added, “I have never heard of someone complaining about the tutoring.” She continued,

We had a course called “pathology”, which is considered the hardest course in nursing. They do not only offer tutoring, but also they offer two session classes on Mondays and Tuesdays for one hour for each class. The tutor reviews the last lecture that the students had. If we feel that we are lost or we are missing something, we can go to the session which includes questions and activities that will just put it, embedded the material in your mind. So that they do not only wait for you to look for a tutor; they also offer you the tutoring.

Mussa and Fadi agreed with Sammia’s responses, and they further elaborated that the tutoring center or academic support center usually asks students if they need any help concerning their courses. Mussa said that, “Before the exams, there is a tutor, and they put a post for him in, meaning they send an email saying that there is a tutor who can help you in the library.” In addition, some participants commented on how the tutoring service helped them to enhance their achievement and grades. According to Mussa, “Those tutors helped me to get high grades in my exams.” Similarly, Fadi included his story with academic support center:

When they see that your grades in the midterm are below C or for example below C-, they send you an email asking if you need help in that particular course. I remember one time when I got D+ in the midterm for my Ethics class, and they said that I can come to discuss that with me. When I came to the center, there was one person saying that he could help me in that course. Meaning, the course was not considered a course within my major, the Ethics, but the, this Support Center was a very helpful program

Moreover, the writing center was especially helpful for the majority of participants, as they themselves noted. For students whose first language is not English, the writing center bridged the gap. According to Abdul:

I was taking class English 102 in the university, and it is a very important class, and I could not be admitted into the major before taking this class. Thus, I took it, and I faced many difficulties in writing and research, and even once the professor told me that if I do not fix my paper, I would not pass the class. Thus, I started to go to the writing center a lot. I found people who were helpful and people who were positive.

In the same way, Rian emphasized the importance of leveraging the services of the writing center, especially for international students. He concluded that:

Because the English language is not our first language, and most of the assignments require, especially in engineering, to write a report about the job that we have done in the lab. So, the writing center is a very nice thing which helps us in correcting some of the grammatical mistakes, choosing the best words, and using a term that is better than of what we have chosen. It happened to me that I use the writing center a lot, and thanks to the writing center, I got good grades in my reports because they correct things that may lower the grade.

Concerning library and university resources, review of the responses indicated a positive reaction from the participants. The library provides a nice atmosphere of studiousness which some students see as a sanctuary that breeds success. Majeed commented that, "The atmosphere helps the student to study." It also provides some resources that students might need, such as laptops, books and so on. Even if the students' needs are not met, they try to procure them, as Majeed mentioned, "... and if it does not exist, you talk to them and they get it for you." Bader concurred stating that, "There is a place in the library, where you can go to

and borrow a laptop, headphones, a camera, or anything that you need and that helps you in your studies.”

Similarly, Rian stated that:

The library is considered as the basic service in any university in America, especially if the student is doing a scientific research for anything or for any class. The library provides a database that encompasses all books or references that the student needs in order to do research. This is a very nice service for the student and free of charge; particularly when he wants to utilize these services outside the university, it would cost him a lot of money. In addition, the university provides laptops for us that we can take home and that have all of the programs that we need for our studies.

In brief, the tutoring center and writing and library services were crucial for most participants in overcoming academic obstacles.

***Activities and entertainments:*** In the three universities studied, eight participants reported their universities’ role as facilitating activities that ensures students’ comfort and entertainment satisfactorily. Bader mentioned that, “I noticed that the university cares too much about providing some recreational time for the student and about preparing activities that encourage the student to like the university and not to think about transferring from it.”

These activities did not always include entertainment, but it may offer other resources beneficial to the student. Misa attended a conference held in Minnesota for female engineering students. The conference gave her an opportunity to meet all Saudi female engineering prospects in the United States. She said that, “The conference encompassed all female students, both the Americans, international and also Saudis. There were presentations about

how a female engineering can affect the society.” Therefore, this conference might not attract male students but for females it could be interesting.

Abdul also spoke of how the universities facilitated Saudi students as it constitutes their association in the University. He said:

They care too much about organizations. When I participated in the Saudi Club, the university gave us rooms and an office in the library to put our belongings. In fact, the university is very collaborative with the students, and it tries the best to ensure students success.

Rian emphasized the role of Saudi Association in his university:

There are many clubs including the Saudi Club. We cannot deny the work of the Saudi’s Club favor in that which help students to be more adapted and comfortable. The Saudi Club is considered one of the student clubs in the university that is officially organized by both the university and Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission. It helps the students to know each other, exchange information, refresh themselves a little bit; as well as listening to their academic pressure and problems. It is maybe a simple thing, but it has a big impact on the academic performance.

Sammia and Bader, who are from different universities, provided a revealing example of university activities. Their universities hold international activities which help students to network with students from different cultures. According to Bader, “The International Day was very helpful because I got to know students from other countries like Brazil, Europe, Africa, and Asia. It gave the students opportunities to have experience with people from other societies.” Sammia also complemented the international community meeting, which is held every month. She reported that, “I really loved the International Community Meeting and also the students there, and I will join them next meeting.”

Sports and other gymnastic recreational activities were mentioned positively by majority of the participants. Fadi said that the university, “cares a lot about the sports activities. We have very good teams, and I have never missed any of their competitions whether in basketball or soccer.” He then asserted how these sports give opportunities for involvement in college life, which subsequently positively affect students. He stated, “I was more engaged because of these activities and even with the American students.”

However, two female participants responded differently about utilizing the university recreation and sport services. They provided negative accounts into the religious and cultural component in which there is no privacy and segregation between male and females. According to Amina, “I do not use facilities like the gym because it is full of males, especially Saudis. There is no a private place inside the gym.”

By the same token, Hanoof discussed how some of her values prohibit her from doing what she likes. She commented that:

I like swimming, but I cannot go to the gym because of religious reasons and also personal reasons which is disgusting to swim for example in a place where multiple people swim in. Maybe this thing is what made me to not practice swimming here. I wish that I could, but I cannot because of mixing males and females.

#### **b) Faculty Interaction:**

Students in this section discussed meaningful experiences they had with faculty members. They mentioned three main issues which are: faculty and student interaction, advising, and special consideration for international students.

**Faculty and student interaction:** All participants reported that interaction with faculty was a positive factor related to their persistence. They articulated how these interactions shaped their perceptions of faculty and either led them to feel disenchanted or satisfied. One participant, Abdul, reported how a professor was very helpful in making the students understand the course. He stated that:

I once took a class, called Machine Design, and it was a class that we were supposed to understand. Then we go to the workshop to do a design for the machine. I noticed that when we went to the professor asking him about that machine and about a specific solution, he came and help us. He was more friendly with us. He tried, I noticed him that he did not want you to just pass the class, no, he also wants you to understand. He even Said 'Do not worry about the grades; I only want you to leave this class with the knowledge that you need. Grade is like the last thing I think about.'

Abdul later alluded to how he liked the way faculty treated him:

I started to feel that the professor does not look at you as if he is the professor and a PhD holder, who is higher than you. I feel that, between him and me is like a friendship. I discuss with him, and even sometimes depending on his personality, we start to talk about things outside the class topic.

Similarly, Rian thought faculty interaction with students was excellent. "Interaction here is excellent, and people, whether us or them, communicate here in a respectful and appreciable way," he reported. He then added:

The thing that I like here a lot, and I wish honestly to see it or even hear about it in Saudi Arabia is the professor's interaction with students...I hear from my friends and from my relatives about their interaction with professors in Saudi universities. The professor there is like a person who gives rules and instructions for the student to follow without any argument with him. What I like in America is that you can talk with the professor;

you can argue with the professor; and the professor knows that he sometimes makes mistakes, meaning you also fix the professor's mistake.

He also spoke of the professor's flexibility in how they provide alternative solutions that fit with a student's interest. "I remember one time I took a class, and I did not like one of the assignments, meaning I did not understand it. So, I asked the professor to change my assignment and he was very collaborative," he recalled.

Amina emphasized that not only is assistance provided by your professors, but it also could be provided by any professor within the university. She stated that:

There is a professor in the math department. She once saw me waiting by the supervisor's office. I talked with her, and at that time I did not know she was a professor in the math department at. She helped me. In fact, she was very supportive. She did not know me, and I was talking normally with her. She started to talk, but she did not say that she was a professor. She just started to talk to me, and I told her about my problem. And she helped me just like that.

Bader agreed with the other participants in the way faculty interact with students. He explained:

In five years that I have been in America, I got the best treatment and respect that I have never seen before. When you get into a professor's office, you do not feel that you are going to talk with a professor. You feel that you will be talking with someone who is waiting for you.

***Advisor cooperation and experience:*** A majority of the participants considered academic advising as one key piece in retention. They emphasized the importance of academic advising in completing their bachelor's degree. Amina discussed her experiences and the reason

for her transfer to her current university. She stated that, “The problem was my supervisor. If you find people who do not help you academically, this pushes you to dropout from the university. This was the reason that made me transfer to another university.”

With proper advising, students know they are on academic track. Bader echoed his advisor’s words, “Bader, you are on track. But, there is a course that if you do not take as soon as possible may make a big difference, and you will be late for graduation.” He then discussed the importance of advisors in guiding a student to his or her goal, asserting:

I used to utilize that time by going to my advisor a week or two weeks ahead. The advisor tells me about my progress; and I notice that when I have the wrong information, she corrects it in order to reach the goal that I want. This was a service, meaning a special service from the advisor that encouraged me to continue my studies in the university and not to ever think about changing or dropping out. She was very helpful in that and she was helping me in getting to the day that I want to graduate.

More clearly, Majeed also talked about how his advisor provides valuable suggestions to meet his goals. He said that:

There was a class that I wanted to drop because of a low grade. He approved, but he told me that if I dropped the class, then I would have to take a summer class or take additional classes in the coming semester or quarter. So, he told me about the things that will occur if I dropped the class.

In contrast, Misa mentioned that the advising services made her late in completing her degree. She commented:

The advisor who has been with me from the first year is supportive. But as an academic advisor, I see that he is bad because he does not lead me the right way. So, he does not

know what are the classes that I need to take and what are the classes that I do not need. This thing also affected my study. I was late to take many classes, and I took many classes that I did not need to take. So, academically, he is not very helpful. On general advice on life he was very helpful. He was helpful when I had many life problems and when I had a problem in the Design Project.

Therefore, not only do students need for the advisor to be helpful, and also knowledgeable to guide students toward completion.

***Special consideration for international students:*** All participants agreed that faculty gave them special considerations because they are international students and they have some barriers to overcome. Abdul mentioned how his professors paid him special consideration as a second language student.

I have met with very helpful and supportive professors, who are helpful with international students concerning the language. They made it easy for us. They give their office hours and do extra work in order to explain to the students if they do not understand anything because of the language.

In similar fashion, Fadi quotes one of his professors, “We will help you and you should not be afraid that you do not speak English as Americans.” He then added how the professor helped him with some academic challenges.

There was one more class called “Non Profit.” All of its vocabulary was completely different from the words used in other classes. Thus, I got 49 out of 100 in my first exam. I was worried that 49 out of 100 means F, which means failing. When I talked to the professor and other faculty members, I found support. They told me that I should not be worried because of the English language, and the professor helped me by writing all of the vocabularies by herself. In my second exam, she made a curve for my own

exam. Then when she saw how hard I was working on the course, she made my grades up at the end of the semester.

Sammia, similarly to Fadi, stated how faculty helped her academically. “They tell me that as a second language student, I have to understand the courses... and they appreciate this. They also may give me homework or exams for extra credits.” Faculty also motivates her to meet her end goal. “There was one time when a professor told me that I am better than many American students and I can complete the course. This was how he encouraged me,” she reported.

### **Theme 3: Social and Academic Integration (Engagement)**

The face-to-face interview helped reinforce the findings from the survey analysis indicating that Engagement scale did not occupy as high an endorsement rating as Personal and Psychological scale did. In this theme, participant’s involvement in the school was discussed. Since these participants are from different culture, they need such adjustment strategies that ensure a high level of engagement, which is discussed in next theme (theme 4).

#### **a) University Community Influence:**

Social and academic integration was an important factor for all participants to complete their degree. The participants included their engagement in university community as a pertinent educational factor. They also discussed how peer support, as part of a university community, helped them to feel more integrated.

***Sense of belonging:*** Having a sense of belonging was an essential factor in why the participants find enjoyment in a university setting. All male participants were positive about university community, whereas three of the females responded negatively (due to culturally-induced shyness). Regarding the positive responses, Fadi said that he did not have “culture shock” because of the sense of belonging. He stated that:

You feel that you belong to the university, and that you really like the university. I feel that we are all one group because the university is small. Meaning we are all one group, and this creates a friendly environment; you get to know more people. I feel really that we belong to each other, and these things are more emotional rather than for the academic purposes. This atmosphere helps me to ignore the fact that I am away from my family, and that I am experiencing a new life. It helped me to adapt to the new life away from my family. It helped me to forget that I am outside Saudi Arabia, and that I am in a different country.

Sammia, a girl from the same university, clarified how a smaller university helped her to become more engaged with a university’s community stating that:

It is small, and I feel that why it is beautiful. Meaning, all of the students are together even if you go from a building to a building, there are closed hallways that are useful in winter and at the same time you just feel that the people are known to you. Meaning, even the students from other majors or the girls from other majors, we can meet with them all the time. You feel they are friendly, meaning when a student says “hi” to you and when you sit with him. If you are waiting for someone, or you are free, the one in front of you starts talking and then you realize that she/he has the same major as you.

Mussa and Rian, males from different large universities, admitted that they never experienced racism or discrimination during their stay at a university. Rian said, “In our university, I did not honestly feel that there is discrimination in communication because of

nationality.” Mussa added, “Since I came to America until now, especially in the university, I have not had the feeling of racism or discrimination against me because I am a Muslim or an Arab or a Saudi.” He continued:

They treat me as any other student in the university. I sit with American students and with students from other countries, from all aspects, and I did not struggle in that. I have never been treated badly or based on my race.

Three of the female students discussed how their shyness was an obstacle when it came to university involvement. Misa stated that, “I did not make many friends with the American students themselves as I was expected.” She thought since she is a shy girl, she cannot get involved easily. “As a Saudi student, I am talking about myself or about other Saudi female students, maybe we are shy from going and talking to other students. Therefore, the friendship is not made,” she opined.

Hanoof and Amina had the same answer as Misa but with greater detail. Hanoof connected her shyness to the nature of education in Saudi Arabia in which she did not experience a mix-gendered university. She pointed out, “I am a very shy person. It was difficult for me honestly to be more involved in a university where females and males are mixed. It was a stress for me.” Amina’s communication with her peers in the university was unsatisfactory for the same reason. She concurred, “Because I am shy, I only contact with them if there are necessary issues, especially with men.”

**Peer support:** More than half of the participants gave accounts saying that peer interaction aided in their success. They discussed how they interact with other classmates in

which they received academic help and became more integrated into the classroom instruction.

According to Rian:

I spend my time in the university, and I meet the other students who are with me in the same class. We study together, and we try to solve problems. Meaning, during the exam time, the library becomes my second home.

Similarly, Fadi added:

The students who are with me in the class are also with me in the dorm. Thus, we all help each other, meaning they were helping me in the presentations and everything. There was a lot of collaboration between me and the American students and also the international students, which makes me more comfortable with this university.

Sammia added how classmates' cooperation helped her to catch up in such academic obligations as notes, homework, or misunderstandings. She stated that:

I see the girls who are next to me, they actually talk to me and ask me if I miss something a professor says because sometimes I do not catch it or do not take the notes on that. They ask me about my homework, and they remind me about the due dates. Meaning, they were themselves coming to me. I remember two of the students next to me used to ask me of what I did in all of the classes, and how I did in the paper...so I felt that all of them are different. They wanted me to study with them, meaning. It is extremely different.

In contrast, two participants mentioned a negative experience regarding their interaction with their classmates. Abdul told how his friend, who is also Saudi, was ostracized by a classmate because of his language barrier or academic achievement. He reported:

My friend faced a situation when he was sitting in a class, and a professor assigned him to a group consisting of an American girl. So, she said in front of the class 'I work with

this student?! No. I do not work with him. Find me another person?’ So, they look at the international students as if they are people who do not know how to study, or try to avoid them because of language barrier or racism. I do not know.

In similar fashion, Amina included a negative experience about her interaction with peers. She asserted how her classmates marginalized her because she is an international student. She stated that:

They interact with you as if you are an idiot. Why?! I once had a project with students who were all Americans, and I was the only Saudi. They treated me as if I do not exist..., whenever I say something, they never listened to me. I repeated what I said one time, second time, and third time. Eventually, I stopped because they never pay attention to you...not because of language. My English is good; in which I do not get stuck when I speak. when I say a sentence, I know exactly that it is correct.

#### **Theme 4: Cultural Considerations**

Saudi students come from a culture that is substantially different from that of the United States. The analysis demonstrated that Saudi students face a challenge in engaging the larger community and university activities because of the cultural divide. According to Rian, “American culture is different from the culture that an Arab student or specifically a Saudi student grows up with.” Since the Engagement scale was not highly endorsed in the survey analysis, it was important to link the level of engagement to the participants’ culture. With cultural considerations, an individual can explore and experience diverse culture and become more engaged.

However, some participants discussed the way that helped them to be adjusted with different cultures as being open-minded and finding culture ally. Fadi stated that, “I am open-minded to other culture in order to be more engaged.” Similarly, Rian suggested that to avoid being isolated, students should adapt to the native culture and be open-minded. He stated that:

You as a Saudi if you want to establish a friendship with an American student, you have to start and talk with him based on his culture. Do not talk with him based on your culture in Saudi Arabia. You do not have to change your culture but you be adjusted with their culture; as long as you are in his country, it is not a shame to accept different culture in order to adapt to the people. So, the way you interact with an American student determines the way that American student interacts with you. So, if you think the way he thinks, the interaction with him will be very easy.

Rian emphasized that the student needs to assimilate with other cultures in order to have commonality in thinking, life, and so forth, which facilitates active interaction. Bander’s response agreed with Rian, asserting that, “We have to respect the culture that we will encounter and that we should be adjusted and careful when doing this.”

Other participants said that introducing Saudi culture could help foreign nationals connect with each other. This could happen through engaging with other Saudi students or participating in Saudi Student Association in Milwaukee. Amina commented, “All of my relations are Saudis because we share the same culture and thinking which make me more comfortable.” Mussa added:

In weekends, I gather with my friends, and we sometimes go on trips to nearby cities or places or parks for recreation. We spend our weekend as a time to have fun whether by

gatherings inside home or outside home. This relationship and engagement helped me with the city environment and with the students around. And it gave me a feeling to be comfortable in the city that I live in. thus, this also helped me to succeed and complete my degree here.

The values, social norms, and traditions in Saudi Arabia are different from that of the United States. When international students move to another country, they naturally carry their own background and life experiences with them. Therefore, Majeed and Bader considered participation in the Saudi Students Association as a way to be engaged with students from the same culture. Majeed said that:

For Saudi club, it is to celebrate the cultural things like the Eid (religious day), the National Day and so on. We gather with Saudis and Muslims. There are Muslims in general and not only Saudis in which we enjoy our culture as we were in Saudi Arabia.

In the same manner, Bader added:

I have participated in most of the Saudi Student Association activities because I get to know new people, and I get to see other; meaning Saudi students whether those whom I have a formal relationship with or those whom I once knew long time ago. So, it is an opportunity to see each other in Eid Alfter(religious day), Eid Aladha (religious day), and the national day. Meaning these things are nice that honestly encourage me to stay in the university until night, sit, and talk with the students. So, you feel as if it is an informal atmosphere.

### **Theme 5: Financial Influence**

The survey analysis indicated that the Financial scale had a relatively lower score mean toward the factors affecting Saudi students to complete their bachelor's degree in the U.S.

However, the face-to-face interviews were conducted to get deeper information behind this factor. The participants demonstrated that their experience with the financial support they receive from the government was integral. As is custom, they receive university tuition and monthly stipends from the Saudi government, which were actually the most crucial. For some of them, this support is sufficient and provides a source for their satisfaction and persistence. Sammia stated, "Without governmental financial support I would not be able to complete my degree, especially when my family is not able to support me financially." Conversely, Rian said that, "If your family do not help you, it is very difficult to complete your education, especially in this expensive life." Therefore, the findings reached that governmental support, family support, and financial management were important to help students cope with financial obligations in the United States.

***Governmental support:*** Generally-speaking, all participants considered the governmental financial support as a positive motivation to complete their bachelor's degree in the United States. According to Misa, "I do not expect that I would come and pay from my own money, if I did not receive the scholarship to America." Similarly, Fadi asserted that without paying tuition he would not complete. He said that if expenses and tuition fees were on him, he, "might drop out from the university because the tuition is not affordable."

In terms of tuition fees, all participants indicated satisfaction. Hanoof commented, "Covering our tuition is on itself a mercy." Bader added, "this is very supportive because paying the tuition fees is the biggest concern that we do not need to worry about." Sammia also included that, "The scholarship covers the monthly stipend the health insurance coverage; and I

do not see any problems with them.” This support reflects on the student psychologically.

Hanoof reported that the support, “gives me a psychological comfort.”

Even though the participants asserted their satisfaction with the financial support and benefits they receive from the government, they still struggle with ancillary expenses, such as books. Multiple stories (more so than simple anecdotes) have been written about how students are not returning to college because they could not afford books, and other academic obligations, particularly international students. Since books are inordinately expensive, the student struggles financially in the beginning of the semester, in which their monthly stipends are not sufficient to pay their personal obligations and books at the same time. The data analysis pointed out that eight out of ten students struggled with paying for books. Amina said, “Every course requires a book of \$100 and something. Meaning, there are students who cannot afford buying the books.” Majeed added, “The student pays \$700 or \$800 or sometimes more in order to buy books, and the sponsor gives him only \$50 in a month or even less for books.”

Bader expounded with more detail:

There is a small amount from the monthly stipend that is allocated for books. I do not see that covers everything. I struggle a lot at the beginning of the term because most of the courses require books, and the cheapest book costs \$80 to \$100. So, when you take four or five classes, you spend about \$500 to \$600 just for the books. The monthly stipend is \$ 1,800; and when you take \$600 from it for the books, and take the housing rent, then it is normal that you will require financial support from your parents.

In addition to books, married students complained about the expensive day care or nursery centers for their children. According to Sammia:

We need support for the day care centers. The day care center next to me is expensive, and I cannot cover it; so my son is just staying at home. There might be cheap day care centers in a faraway area which I cannot guarantee my son's safety. It will be difficult for a student to manage his academic schedule to stay home and take care of the child; and at the same time sending the child to day care could be financially harder.

Rian also responded:

If you have children who need nurseries. The nurseries are so expensive in America. This thing is very annoying for me. For example, the stipend is \$1800 and the nursery costs reach to \$1200 and the housing costs \$1800; thus how can we live?

The majority of the participants discovered that the cost of living differs based on the states and cities in which they reside. In other words, allocating the same monthly stipend for all Saudi students in the United States regardless of cost living of their particular state or city affected them financially (usually detrimentally). According to Rian:

It depends on the state or the city that you live in. There are some states in which you can live comfortably with the stipend because of the low cost of living. There are some cities in these states like here in Milwaukee; it is considered expensive if you want a clean, respectful and, safe housing for your family. This may cost you about three fourths of the stipend.

In the similar manner, Majeed said:

If you come to the scholarship, it gives an equal stipend for all students in America, disregarding that the States differ, the cities differ, the universities differ, and the majors differ. Meaning, the medical students cannot tolerate medical stuff, and also the engineering students cannot tolerate the book prices.

**Family support:** Several students aired their financial concerns. As a substitute solution to bridge their financial gap, they ask for financial support from their families. Eight students stated that they receive financial support from their families. Misa said that receiving money from her parents is paramount. “I spent days, really, really, in the months when my parents could not send me money, I spent days just eating bread and cheese,” Misa said, “it affects me emotionally.”

Abdul described what happened in the case where there was a financial support from his family. He said that:

If my parents stop supporting me financially, and if I only depend on the monthly stipend, then I would have to go back home and cook and wash, and this takes some of my studying time. So, that is why, when it comes to the financial matters, I have to receive support from my parents. And by the way, I am currently waiting for support.

Majeed also expressed his feelings of being financially supported by his family and how that affected him academically. He said:

There should be support from the family. It encourages me, meaning it is a support that comforts me; it comforts me. Meaning, it makes me focus on my studies. It does not make me to think about financial things. Meaning if my parents supported me to buy a car; if the parents supported me to buy books; if the parents supported me to travel during vacations, so, and sometimes, if I do not have enough money for the apartment rent, my family supports me, so they make my focus on my studies more than to think about other things... meaning like fear or worry about that I do not have enough money to buy a particular thing or to buy a particular calculator or a particular book or.....So family support is very important, especially for the books and the housing.

Fadi and Sammia, who attend the same university, reported that they do not receive financial support from their families because they are not in financial straits. Sammia stated that, "Everything is covered by the scholarship. And my parents cannot support me financially." Both Sammia and Fadi discussed how financial management is important for them to afford the cost of living, which is discussed in the following.

***Financial management:*** Several participants insisted that students should create a spreadsheet of sorts of the monetary value of their needs that fit with their budget. In other words, making policy for priorities and needs increases students' probability to afford or at least manage the cost of living. "I should be aware of everything that I pay for," Mussa said. He then added, "I do not spend a lot of money on what I do not need." Accordingly, Sammia said:

We manage our expenses, and the stipend thanks God covers our expenses, and we were able to enjoy our time and travel. Meaning, one should know how to plan, one should not take the stipend from one hand and buy whatever he wants on the other hand. Meaning, one should plan throughout the month of what he needs or does not need. One should plan even before receiving the stipend. He should know what he wants to buy, and what his obligations are.

Fadi also described how to manage his monthly stipend. He reported,

I see that the monthly stipend from the government is more than enough, meaning it covers all of my expenses. I am even able to save some money from this stipend, and I do not feel that I need more money at the end of the month...Sometimes, you encounter circumstances that are out of your control. For example, sometimes you have more expenses than what you thought, and this may affect your budget, but I was able to overcome these struggles through using the money I already saved in the previous months.

Therefore, financial support from family and government were both important for Saudi students to complete their education in the United States. Even though the majority of participants were not satisfied with their particular financial reimbursement, they gave positive responses about certain benefits they receive: tuition fee, medical insurance, and compensated travel expenses.

### **Summary of the Face-to-Face Findings:**

The second stage of the analysis was developed in order to collect additional information related to the survey results, as well as to produce a point of convergence between the survey and face-to face interview portions of the research. The survey results demonstrate the patterns of factors affecting Saudi students in completing their bachelor degree in the U.S. from most severe to least: (a) Personal Factor, (b) Psychological Factor, (c) Faculty Factor, (d) Engagement Factor, (e) University Services Factor, and (f) Financial factors. The least impactful factors in the patterns do not mean that they are not supportive factors for Saudi Students in completing their degree, but rather that they might be affected by the small sample size in which the need for face-to-face interviews exists to support this deficiency. As a result, five supporting themes emerged in the face-to face analysis, which are: (1) Personal and Psychological Factors, (2) Institutional Factors, (3) Social and Academic Integration, (4) Cultural Considerations, and (5) Financial Influence

Within the survey analysis, out of the six scales examined (Personal, Psychological, Faculty, Engagement, University Services, and Financial), the Personal and Psychological scales had the largest frequencies of occurrence, indicating students' responses lay mostly between

agree and strongly agree. Personal and psychological factors were significant more motivating factors. After conducting the interview, the participants produced rich information about these two factors and gave them preference over the others. Parents' desires, student ambition and goals, better jobs, educational value, academic achievement and self-efficacy were the most important personal and psychological factors for the participants in completing their schooling.

The expectations parents have for the education of their children was associated with the students' motivation to complete their education abroad. Both survey and interview analysis conclude that father's education level were endorsed by participants as important contributors to motivating their degree completion, which was considered a Personal factor. In other words, students whose fathers have a high level degree tend to persist more than those whose fathers have low degree.

Beside parents' desire for their child to complete their degree, some participants had specific goals that contributed to their drive toward degree completion, being that education ensures a better prospective career and prestigious social position. They also might come from Saudi Arabia to have a better quality of education that ensures a better career in their home. Since the Saudi industries and companies require professional skills and English language, the need for qualifiers with different experiences increase. Therefore, a student who graduates from an American university has a higher opportunity to be employed than one who graduates from a Saudi university.

Even though academic achievement and GPA were important for the Personal and Psychological factors, some students maintained that they can overcome challenges because

they came to the United States with a manageable goal in mind. The interview findings also demonstrated that English deficiency was not a barrier for the participants that led them to quit collegiate education. Through time and determination, they reported the ability to overcome this deficiency. Also, these students have a high level of self-reported self-efficacy, which presumably helps them overcome such troubles they may face as less-preparedness for college and lower academic achievement.

Institutional Factors (Faculty Interaction and University Services and Resources) were considered to see how they affect Saudi students' completion of their bachelor degree in the U.S. Reinforcing the survey analysis, the interview analysis indicated that all participants reported that interaction with faculty and advisors was a net positive factor relating to their persistence. Since English is not the first language of the participants, they receive special considerations from their professors which helps to buttress their adjustment academically. Advisors also support these students in meeting their academic goals in order to stay on track for graduation.

Additionally, all participants reported that they appreciated the institutional resources, services, and activities while attempting to complete their degree. Tutoring and writing centers help the students with their academic challenges, which eventually ensures their academic adjustment and retention. Academic services and entertainment facilities help the students to be more engaged socially as well as academically. The finding shows that female students had different perspectives than males regarding university activities and facilities. They reported that they cannot engage such activities as gyms because of the mixing of genders that entails.

Based on that, these students might appreciate facilities that meet and respect their cultural and religious concepts.

Despite the fact that the Engagement factor did not occupy the highest mean score as it relates to Saudi students studying in the United States, the interview analysis reports that social integration was most frequently associated with participants' experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. When a student engages with classmates inside the classroom, he/she might attain a higher level of academic engagement and achievement. However, cultural barriers may influence this level of engagement. Since the participants came from different backgrounds, they pointed out strategies that helped them to be adjusted to a new setting, such as being open-minded to other cultures (assimilation), as well as celebrating home culture with people from the same country.

As a way to find out why the existence of financial support did not register a higher mean score, it was important to explore students' responses through the face-to-face interviews. The findings conclude that governmental financial support was a positive motivating factor for the participants, but that it was not the main reason for their completion. These students came from a country where education is (ostensibly) free-of-charge. As a result, they came to the United States, not due to financial strictures, but out a focused need to attain certain goals and satisfy ambition. They stated that the governmental support includes tuition, medical insurance, and living expenses; however, other obligations and lifestyle expenses are not affordable for most of the participants which leads them to contact (or, "gently petition") their family for some additional money. Thus, they are satisfied with governmental supports surrounding the educational process, but that they may not adequately cover living expenses.

In other words, the achievement of academic and career goals is ultimately more important than the burden presented by any shortcomings in finances.

Also, both survey and interview analyses indicate that married students had more considerations than male students concerning how available financial support influenced their degree completion. Married students reported a higher mean and positive responses relating to the financial factor. This difference could be predicated on obligations that married students have, such as child care, partner's needs, and so on (emphasis on partner's needs).

## CHAPTER VI

### Discussion and Conclusion

#### Introduction:

This study examined the factors contributing to persistence and college retention for undergraduate Saudi students studying in the United States. Retention is defined as the school's ability to keep a student from enrollment to graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005), whereas persistence is defined as a student's ability to finish the intended degree (Yorke & Longden, 2004).

The researcher first distributed and analyzed a survey for a sample of 45 students (of senior standing) from three universities in the State of Wisconsin, particularly from the City of Milwaukee. The goal of the survey was to identify patterns of factors that facilitate and/or hinder completion of a bachelor's degree. Then, a smaller sub-sample of 10 students were selected for the purpose of interviews in order to get more details. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2015), it is essential to listen to the student participants' stories through conducting in-depth interviews in order to grasp how they make meanings of their experiences.

In this section, the researcher first interpreted the findings from the surveys and face-to-face interviews. Then, the findings of both stages were placed in a context of the literature review, which was already analyzed, and combined together. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), "In order to fully understand the findings they are compared and contrasted to what can be found in published literature in order to situate the new data into preexisting data" (p.

555). After that, the researcher examined the implications and limitations of the study in order to prove what should be done for future policies and study.

The following were the research questions that guided the study:

1. How and which institutional factors and support services affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
2. How do academic advisors and faculty affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
3. How do GPA and percentage of credit hours completed affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
4. How does Saudi governmental aid affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?
5. How does social integration in the U.S. affect Saudi students' retention?
6. How do cultural factor and linguistic factors affect Saudi students' retention in U.S. universities?

### **Discussing the Findings**

Based upon the findings of this study, the researcher developed two stages of results; one included the survey results, and the second included the interview analysis. Out of six scales (personal, psychological, faculty, engagement, university services, and financial), the Personal and Psychological scales had the largest frequency of occurrence; indicating students' responses were mostly between agree and strongly agree. Conversely, the lowest average was registered for Financial scale.

Saudi students tend to persist in completing their bachelor's degree because they came to the United States with many Personal and Psychological reasons. As indicated in the interview analysis, these reasons include the student's desire to gain a better prospective career or climb to a better social standing (social class) among their society. In addition, having specific goals and the requisite ambition to achieve them are obviously significant factors for a student's success which metastasizes in the continuation of their educational plans. Academic achievement and a superior GPA also contribute to a student's motivation to finish their degree. This, coupled with a high level of self-efficacy, can overcome such obstacles they may face as inadequate preparedness for college.

As to the Institutional factors, the survey analysis indicates that neither faculty interaction with students, nor university services had either lower or higher mean scores concerning their effect on Saudi students in completing their degree in the U.S. The face-to-face analysis demonstrates that all participants reported that interaction with faculty and advisors was a positive factor relating to their persistence. When students experience pleasant interaction with their faculty, this in-turn produces a better atmosphere inside the classroom more conducive to academic adjustment. Institutional resources, services, and activities also motivate Saudi students to complete their degree. These services provide the academic and social environment that students need. However, women reported that they do not utilize university facilities in so far as they conflict with their cultural and religious concepts.

Similar to the institutional factors, the Engagement scale was examined and it registered a similar mean score. The interview analysis clarified this scale and showed that social integration was most frequently associated with participants' experiences both inside and

outside the classroom. However, since the participants came from different cultural backgrounds, they face various levels of difficulty with engagement. They mentioned strategies that help them to be adjusted as being open-minded and tolerant of the new culture's mores as well as continuing to celebrate home culture with fellow nationals.

As the lowest mean score in the retention pattern, the survey analysis indicates that the Financial factors are not the best determinant for the participants' completion of their degree. The interview analysis illustrated that while Saudi students are satisfied with tuition and medical insurance, the majority of them stated that they cannot meet living expenses.

Demographic and socioeconomic factors (age, gender, major, marital status, family income, educational history of father and mother, and their respective work status) were also examined to see how students' responses about retention factors were significantly different based upon these variables. The results showed that students' responses toward these items were not significantly different between genders, age, majors, family income, and mother's educational level.

In contrast, both the Financial and Psychological scales had significant differences between marital status groups. For both scales, means were significantly higher for married couples than for single students. In other words, psychological and financial factors were more effective motivators for married students than single students concerning the completion of their degree. One interpretation might be that married students may have a higher level of self-efficacy and/or self-esteem that motivates them to complete their degree in a timely and quality fashion. Similarly, married students may have more obligations than single students which perhaps led them to consider financial support as a more significant factor affecting the

completion of their degree. The interview analysis reached the same result— that married students give more preference for the financial aspect than single students. Since these students (with F1 Visa) are not allowed to work in the United States, they get support from their parents to afford some financial obligations.

There was also a significant main effect of fathers' educational level on students' responses toward their completion of the bachelor's degree as it relates to the Personal scale. The participants whose fathers hold a 2-year college degree had the highest mean, whereas the lowest mean were registered with fathers partial completion of some college educational level. A possible explanation for this result is that fathers who did not graduate from college might not in-turn motivate their sons or daughters to complete their education. Especially since, some students view their fathers as role models. The second stage of the analysis concluded that the father's educational level could be a motive for the participants to complete their collegiate degree.

More details of these results (survey and face-to-face) are discussed in the following, concentrating on the face-to-face themes.

### **Theme 1: Personal and Psychological Factors**

According to Tinto (1975), student commitment to earn a degree was linked to individual/personal reasons. The survey results indicated that the Personal and Psychological scale had the highest average means of all scales. In the same manner, the face-to-face findings reported that family desire, student's ambition and goals, job accessibility, and educational value increased the participant's probability of completing their degree. In other words,

student's ambition, better job, family desire, and so on were the most indicative factors in degree completion. Shabeeb's (1996) study indicated that the personal issues were essentially detrimental factors that may affect both Saudi and other international students from the Arabian Gulf in the United States to complete their degrees.

Educational level of family and their desire were essential for some participants to complete their degree. Thayer (2000) found that the persistence of first generation students is likely lower than their non-first generation counterparts. One participant in the study stated:

My father and mother are all university graduates, and my older siblings are university graduates, so I do not want to be the one with the lowest level of education in the family. So, my family gave me the motivation to pursue my education and to get the bachelor's degree.

From the last statement, a family's desire for the student to obtain higher education was linked to their education level. The survey results suggested that the fathers' educational level had a significant impact on students' responses regarding retention, whereas the mother did not have this impact. A father's educational level might be more effective than a mother's because of the nature of culture and history of women's education in Saudi Arabia. In 1956, The Saudi government established the first school for girls. Since that time up until 1970, there was no interest for women to complete their degree (Baki, 2004). Over the years, women's interest and perception of education has changed. Cordesman (2003) states that statistically speaking, "The number of males graduating annually from university rose from 795 in 1970 to 21,229 in 1999, while the number of female graduates rose from 13 to 21,721" (p. 12). In that time, women had focused in their household and child care.

On the other hand, a few face-to-face findings contradicted the effect of parent's education on student's persistence. Accordingly, one participant said that she wanted to complete her bachelor's degree because her mother was not educated. Therefore, she would complete the degree in order to fulfill her mother's aspiration (a parent desiring that their child have a better life than they have had).

As shown in the findings, having a specific academic career goal increases student persistence because of the additional focus that such a goal commands. Similarly, Robbins et al. (2004) found that performance-based and goal-based motivation constructs were reliably predictive of both academic performance and persistence.

The results of this study also suggest that a future career motivated the participant students to complete their degree abroad. Studying abroad in a different experience and language than Saudi Arabia may increase their probability of obtaining better jobs than those who study in the mother country. A participant said that "We always see that the graduates, especially from the United States, if they come back to Saudi Arabia and work in the government or companies, they will have a priority than other students and other employees." Jammaz (1981) included that future jobs in the home country was one of the reasons for increased Saudi student adjustment and retention in the United States. More broadly, Bourdieu (1985) maintains that the dominance of "cultural capital" legitimizes the maintenance of the status and power of the controlling classes. These students may study abroad to gain a future carrier that ensures a higher level of prestige or salary.

The participants paid high attention to education's value as a factor for completing the bachelor's degree. The higher education's degree changes the way a person's life in innumerable ways: it improves him/her socially, economically, and culturally. They discussed that educated people are better in thinking, skills, success, and so on. Akhtarkhavari's (1994) study agreed with this conclusion. It stated that Saudi students demonstrated a positive perception of their educational values in the United States so far as it helped them acquire new skills and become more understanding of other cultures. Similarly, Andrade (2008) found that a student's belief about the value of education and how it contributes to his/her attitudes (open-mindedness towards cultural differences, skills, and motivation) were important to succeed and complete their education.

In addition, academic achievement was an essential factor for the participants in completing their respective degrees. Even though participants reported some academic problems that could affect their achievement (most notably, precollege-preparedness and language barriers), they were insistent on completing their degree. One student stated that, "I had some problems in the English classes and in the general courses, so it affected my grades a lot." He then clarified that, "I can do better in a course in which I got a low grade." Heyn (2013) found that English language barriers were a major hindrance to Saudi students becoming academically adjusted in American Universities. However, having a high level of self-efficacy reinforces student persistence. Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz (2010) found that self-efficacy beliefs affect GPA and persistence rates. Students with high GPA's represented a high level of self-efficacy.

Poor pre-college preparation and English language seemed to be the most devastating obstacles to international student academic integration. Astin (1975) emphasizes that students who are academically underprepared cause a major concern for colleges and universities. He states that academic achievement is highly correlated to student's educational experiences in elementary and secondary school. All participants complained that the educational system in Saudi Arabia is far different from that in the United States. High schools in Saudi Arabia did not adequately prepare them in basic academic skills, especially among the sciences. They reasoned that their American counterparts have experiences about college courses because they already studied them briefly in secondary school.

According to Tinto (1987), "Persistence in college requires individuals to adjust, both socially and intellectually, to the new and sometimes quite strange world of college" (pp. 47-48). Therefore, students need to have sufficient academic experiences that ensures their academic adaptation. When students take courses in which they are deemed novices, anxiety may ensue that leads them to drop out the course or even from the university altogether.

Therefore, the lack of college preparation and language barriers limit students' ability to be self-confident, interact with others in the classroom, participate with professors, and so forth. According to Tinto (1993), pre-college education interactions improve a student's initial commitment to the institution and to its academic goals. Two research studies by Andrade (2006; 2008) illustrated that student academic abilities and language skills were important to succeed academically (perhaps unsurprisingly). Some students reported these skills can affect their GPA, especially in the first year. Similarly, Al-Harthi (1987) found that Saudi students in

American universities changed to different majors or left the school due to an inadequate background in math and science.

The findings also reported that students usually persist to complete their degree when they achieve a high grade point average (GPA). All participants stated that the prospect of obtaining a high GPA motivates them and increases their ability to complete their education. On the other hand, a low GPA could provoke the student to depart the school prior to graduation. A participant said that, “The high grades, of course, encourage me to continue, and they give me confidence in myself that I can continue.” These findings agree with Allen et al. (2008) that the level of academic performance (GPA) and motivation had a direct effect on retention as well as the probability of transfer (turnover). Similarly, Kwai (2009) reached that high GPA affected retention of undergraduate international students from fall 2006 to fall 2007 in two public statewide four-year university systems in the Midwest. Mamiseishvili (2011) found that GPA had positive relationship with persistence of undergraduate international students. He stated that if GPA is higher, then the probability of retention increases.

## **Theme 2: Institutional Factors**

Even though the mean response on the University Services scale was not elevated (though not low enough to suggest systematic disagreement either), a majority of interviewees provided positive responses about university services. On that account, it seems that a small sample size could not bring an accurate result. According to Wisz et al. (2008), “Predictions based on small samples are generally unlikely to be suitable” (p. 771). In other words, with low sample size, the present study may have been statistically underpowered. However, using face-

to-face findings can bridge the gap of a small sample to ensure the accuracy and gain more details. Hill (1998) emphasizes that:

If the methodology attracts large amounts of qualitative information, as is the case with ideographic techniques such as interview, case study or repertory test, then practical constraints may mean that the researcher needs to settle for a small sample size. (p. 8)

The interview findings revealed that academic services coupled with student's satisfaction with them affect their propensity to persist in their universities. These services include academic, activity, and entertainment services. Tinto's (1993) student integration theory hypothesizes that academic and social support is a condition that reinforces student retention. Academic and social support occurs through providing important facilities and activities in a university campus, e.g., writing centers, tutoring, recreation, etc.

Academic services provide a wide array of academic supports for students: math and writing tutoring, library resources, and individualized one-on-one meetings to discuss any barriers that might prevent students from reaching their full academic potential. Students' experiences with such academic services as writing centers or "success or academic centers," reflected their satisfaction with the university. Students usually face academic problems that could affect their achievement (most notably, language barriers). Writing centers are a good place for English as Second Language (ESL) students to get their writing edited in a timely and quality manner. As the participants denoted, these centers help them to overcome any number of academic obstacles they may face. Satisfaction with academic services ensures their continuation and simultaneously increases student's retention rates. Tinto (1993) stated that positive experiences and interventions will increase persistence among students, whereas

negative experiences will weaken commitment to academic excellence and social integration. Therefore, student's satisfaction about academic services contributes to enhanced retention rate.

Such facilities (e.g. labs, computer, and so on) bridge the gap between a student's desires and their academic achievement and retention. These labs and computer services provide a rich environment for the student in which he can use applications he needs, free-of-charge. Not only do these facilities and services help the students financially, but also the findings proved that these facilities help the students academically, through promoting teaching methods. The participants revealed that library and other academic services were those most frequently utilized by the Saudi students. Shabeeb's (1996) study supports this finding. He found that university services, whether academic services or activities, helped Saudi and other international students from the Arabian Gulf in the United States to become more adjusted in their universities.

According to activities and entertainment, most participants reported their universities' role as facilitating activities that ensures students' comfort and entertainment. Due to the quality of facilities, they considered the universities' community as very engaged. According to Bean (2005), "Social Activities that contain academic and intellectual components can simultaneously promote academic and social integration" (p. 229). Activities are vital tools for the school to determine not only the interests of their students but their skills and aptitudes for variant courses of study. It is important to give the students an opportunity for social integration during leisure time (e.g. athletic center, student union, etc.) while considering norms, traditions, and the values of their culture. When foreign students feel isolated and

marginalized, their academics are negatively impacted. The same is true when universities do not have creative outlets that are congruent with their native cultures.

Two female participants reported that cultural and religious norms were reasons for them to avoid participation in such university recreation as gyms. They do not attend a gym that is mix-gendered because out of respect for their culture and religion. According to Moghadam (1998), gender segregation is a cultural concept that is evident in almost every public and private institution in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, a consensus of Saudi students will have this value, suggesting that students encountering a conflict with US non-gender-segregated facilities may be a common issue for the students.

Beside the university services, faculty interaction and advising also contribute to student retention. According to Tinto (1997), "If social integration is to occur, it must occur in the classroom" (p. 599). Thus, the classroom is a gateway for student interaction with faculty. The survey results were not significantly elevated on the Faculty scale (i.e., the mean value was near the Neutral Likert-scale option). Therefore, the participants' responses concerning the faculty factor in the survey analysis was neither high nor low. As a result, the need for the face-to-face interviews existed to collect more information about students' responses about the faculty effect on Saudi students' retention in American colleges.

Students in this the interview findings explained meaningful experiences they had had with faculty members. They articulated how these interactions shaped their perceptions of faculty and either led them to feel disenchanted or satisfied. The findings revealed that Saudi

student satisfaction with their faculties as well as proving how this treatment and interaction motivated them to stay in the university were illustrative.

The findings demonstrated that the quality of interaction between the students and their professors play a significant role in their degree completion persistence. These findings coincide with the studies by Endo and Harpel (1982). They reached the conclusion that students who have more contact with peers and faculty demonstrate higher levels of achievement over the course of their stay in college. When the student receives substantial support from his/her professor, the student presumably may place more trust in said professor. Moreover, this trust might fuse and spread with the students' experiences in the classroom and even interaction amongst classmates.

When the professor begins to know the student more as a feeling human being rather than merely a person with a pencil, the professor can make allowances for the student's life circumstances; such as: sickness, family, stress, unspecified personal issues, etc. Within this interaction between professor and his/her students, the educational environment will be built on a spirit of cooperation and practical edification. Otherwise, less than optimal conditions may drive the student to desire leaving to find more suitable situations. One participant said, "I did not like one of the assignments, meaning I did not have an idea about. So, I asked the professor to change my assignment and he was very collaborative."

The participants also explained that they have exceptional treatment and consideration particularly because they are international. Based on that, the faculty tries to find the each and every possible way to make them feel comfortable in the university. This also enhances the

quality of interaction. Al-nusair (2000) studied Saudi students' perceptions on their collegiate experiences and found that they were more involved than U.S. students in interaction with faculty and conversations related to coursework and assignments.

As a part of faculty interaction, academic advising was essentially important for the participants to complete their bachelor's degree. Al-Harthi's (1987) study about Saudi students in the United States supports this finding. His study concluded that these students changed to different majors or left the school due to poor academic advising, lack of supervision and monitoring progress, and ignoring students' need and academic requests. Tinto (1987) asserts that academic advising is a major key to educate and retain students. In a higher education setting, there is a greater need for academic advisors in which they help the student stay on track in order to graduate on time. Accordingly, one participant mentioned, "The advisor gives you the plan, which is the, the academic plan to tell you that in how many years you will graduate." Therefore, academic advisors are the direct connection between the student and the institution, which help students fulfill their needs from the institution.

### **Theme 3: Social and Academic Integration**

Even though the survey analysis did not identify a significant finding with regard to Engagement and University Community scale, the qualitative analysis revealed a positive engagement and cooperation within the university community. Having a sense of belonging was an essential factor as to why the participants do not experience culture shock, and consequently they persist. Tinto's theory (1987) that students could remain persisted even if they separate themselves from their family, and their home community agrees with these

findings. With good campus environment, students feel themselves as a part of the “community.”

As a way of this engagement, all participants with the exception of two stated that the university community is free of racism and discrimination. They meant by “university community” that those university policies, facilities, and system does not give privileges for specific people or races over others. Therefore, the participants felt that they are not different from other students in the campus, and they are treated equally. In contrast, Heyn’s (2013) findings showed that Saudi students in the United States experienced racism, and that this experience was the most challenging barrier for their completion. According to Tinto (1993), “Academic climates that discourage or discriminate, however subtly, are also climates that give rise to student failure and departure” (p. 74). Individuals feel that they do not fit in a community or school setting when they are marginalized.

Peer support was a form of social engagement that most participants complemented. Styron (2010) emphasizes that, “The most important step to becoming engaged and involved is for students to interact with their peers” (p. 4). The findings included how the participants’ relationship with others in the classroom reinforces their academic achievement, in which they mutually interact and cooperate. Bonding with peers helps students overcome culture shock, feelings of loneliness, and marginalization. Astin (1993) confirms that interaction with peers is correlated positively with many student outcomes, such as grade point average (GPA), self-esteem/self-image, and interpersonal skills (Astin, 1993). Similarly, Swenson et al. (2010) found that there was a positive and substantial relationship between the quality of peers and academic achievement.

Conversely, only two participants reported negative experiences with peers. For example, one participant included his friend's story that a classmate did not accept working with him merely because he was a foreigner. The other participant also felt marginalized because she is a foreign national too, as she said. Language could be a barrier for international students to get involved with one another. According to Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth, (2004), social support is influential to students who are away from their home country for the first time, are of a different race, have limited English proficiency, and suffer from other problems that may impede their ability to fit in socially. Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) examined the relationship between discrimination, homesickness, and difficulty the English language. The authors found that international students experienced more discrimination based on language difference. Therefore, discrimination based on language may eventually lead to student departure.

Being a woman could also affect the level of sense of belonging and the educational attainment. When a woman come from a culture that segregates genders in school, it may be difficult for her to engage in American school, especially in the beginning. As a result, this low level of sense belonging may reflect her adjustment in the school in which she may prefer going home and study there.

#### **Theme 4: Cultural Considerations**

Saudi students come from a culture that varies from that of the United States. As result they have more difficulty in attaining the desire engagement as well utilizing university

facilities. For example, women cannot utilize gyms because of mixing gender. According to Andrade (2006), learning a new culture and learning *within* a new culture are crucial for international students in order to experience different beliefs and values. The qualitative analysis showed that the participants face a culture challenge in the United States, but this challenge can be overcome in certain ways. They stated that they can overcome the cultural issues by accepting and adjusting to other cultures, finding cultural allegiances, and respecting the other culture in order to become more engaged on a personal as well as impersonal basis.

One participant said that “I am open-minded to other culture in order to be more engaged.” International students in a foreign country should give themselves a chance to know and discover the other culture, which may help them to acknowledge and even embrace it. With closed eyes, an individual can see neither the positive nor the negative side. Byrd (1991) asserts that retention of international students depends on adapting with and assimilating to American culture. In this study, the participant demonstrated an ability for this adaptation albeit not from the moment of arrival. In support of this finding, Oweidat (1981) found that Saudi students who had resided in the United States for at least three years had values similar to those held by Americans. Akhtarkhavari (1994) also reached that Saudi students earning their degrees from the United States had a positive perception about their education and values in the United States.

A way of overcoming cultural challenge is finding a cultural similarity or “ally.” The participants of the present study emphasized that they compensated for the lack of cultural adjustment through finding some people who have the same culture or have shared interests. A participant reported that, “All of my relations are Saudis because we share the same culture

and thinking which make me more comfortable.” Cultural integration in the university setting is a major determinant of student retention (Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 2006). Thomas (2002) emphasizes that as a way to avoid marginalization, students prefer engaging with people who share the same culture and value in which they feel that their culture is dominant. Hence, an individual who engages and celebrates culturally similar traditional events as their country of origin, may enhance persistence.

### **Theme 5: Financial Influence**

The survey analysis indicated that the Financial scale had the lowest mean concerning participants’ responses on the factor affecting their completion of the bachelor’s degree. Since these participants already gained scholarships with a fully paid tuition as well as a monthly stipend, they would not see finances as a priority. Moreover, the small sample size may have been statistically underpowered to detect an effect. Conversely, the face-to-face findings concluded that all participants consider the financial governmental support as a positive motivation to complete their bachelor’s degree in the United States. According to Bean (2005), “Running out of money is probably the best excuse for leaving college that there is, because it places the reason for leaving outside the locus of control of the student” (p. 234).

When considering the demographic question, the survey analysis showed that married students responded differently than single students about how financial issues affect their retention and persistence. Apparently, the married students (with a significantly higher mean response) considered the financial aspect as effective for retention more than single students.

This difference could be predicated on obligations that married students need as child care, wife's needs, and so on (emphasis on wife's needs). Supporting this finding, the interview analysis reached the same conclusion. The married participants clarified that they are loaded with extra expenses that are not covered by the sponsor as expensive child care. They receive almost \$270 for each child, while the day care centers require more than \$800.

Even though the participants asserted their satisfaction with the financial support and benefits they receive from the government, they still struggle with ancillary expenses, such as books and lifestyle obligations. The findings signaled that since books are prohibitively expensive, the student struggles financially in the beginning of the semester, in which their monthly stipends are not yet sufficient to pay their personal obligations and books at the same time. Therefore, the data analysis pointed out that even though Saudi students receive substantial financial support, this support cannot cover book expense. Singell (2001) studied the effect of financial issues and students' needs on student retention. He found that (needs-based) aid improves retention, but that its level of effectiveness varies with the level of necessity.

As a result of the extra expenses and obligations, the findings pointed out, that eight participant students receive a monthly financial support from their families, whereas the remaining two do not receive it because they make other financial arrangements, as they said. Thus, that was also a motive for their completion in the school. Bean (2005) clarifies that students who receive financial support from parents probably have a high level of social and human capital. The student needs money to participate in the social life of a college, "and social integration and institutional fit have an economic base" (Bean, 2005, p. 236). Therefore, the

student with lower-income might not fit in, which eventually might lead him/her to leave the school. Kennamer (2010) states that low-income students are more prone to dropping out than middle or high income ones.

### **Main Findings**

In this case study, the researcher found that the Personal and Psychological scale had the most important factors affecting Saudi students to complete their degree in U.S. However, the Financial scale was not important for most of the participants. These students persist to complete their bachelor's degree because of their parent's desires and education, their ambitions and goals, their hope to have a better career, and the value of education they consider. Self-efficacy and esteem contributed also to their completion. Even though most participants discussed their comfort with paid tuitions, they have financial problems but these problems did not stop them to complete their goal (Personal factor). A study by Shabeeb (1996) on Saudi students agreed with this finding. It indicated that Saudi students gave preference to such personal factors and other institutional factors (English proficiency, grades, and other factors) to complete their degree in the United States, whereas the least factor was registered for the financial aid.

Similarly, some literatures on international students indicate that international students persist to completion of their degree because of Personal and Psychological factors. Mamiseishvili (2011) found that that GPA, degree goals, and academic integration had significant positive effects on persistence of undergraduate international students. Conversely, when the Financial scale in this study was not important for Saudi students studying in the

United States, literatures on domestic students indicated that the provision of needs-based aid enhanced both enrollment and retention (Singell, 2004; MacCallum, 2008).

### **Implications**

While this study cannot be generalized to institutions in other areas, the findings imply several implications for institutions of higher education in the United States, the ministry of education in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi students seeking to study abroad. These implications are solely on Saudi students. The goal is to find how the student can persist and how the university can retain this student. Thus, it is a mutual, even symbiotic, relationship between the student and institution to fulfill this retention goal.

With regard to the emerging themes, some participants mentioned how they feel marginalized when they engage with American students. Even though it is difficult to control how the individual behaves in relation to other groups, the university could enhance this behavior through promoting this individual to join these groups and their events. For example, when American students celebrate with Saudi students their cultural events or ceremonies, they will adapt with that culture, which may eventually enhance their engagement even in the classroom. Tinto (1993) emphasized that both social and academic integration work together in improving students' decision to persist to degree attainment. If social integration occurs, even outside the classroom, the academic engagement with peers should be attained, as it likely will contribute to academic achievement.

The emerging themes also proved that Saudi student participants came from their country not adequately prepared for some courses compared to their counterpart American students. This is a message for pre-college education in all countries that the educational system should ensure its ability to qualify an individual to be adjusted with any educational system overseas. Consequently, this increases student's self-efficacy and retention. Andrade (2006) found that adjusting to the new academic environment, and self-efficacy were key factors contributing to international students' academic success.

In addition, students' experiences could differ based on gender. For instances, some females shared the common thought of other participants that it is difficult to assimilate into the culture of the university. They stated that it may be difficult to find recreation when activities promoted by the school do not pertain to their values and religion, which in turn, negatively affects level of engagement. As a result, the school should consider a student's culture in the activities, classrooms, and teaching methods to ensure that they fit in the educational system (so long as it does not undermine or hinder said system). Thomas (2002) states that "institutional habitus" plays a significant factor in student retention. He emphasizes that individuals who are inculcated in the dominant culture are the most likely to succeed academically, while other students are marginalized. Therefore, considering culture is a vital tool for the school to determine not only the interests of their student but their skills and aptitudes for variant courses of study. Tinto (1993) says that students who experience a lack of institutional fit and isolation are more likely to leave the college. Foreign students feel isolated and marginalized, which in turn harms their academics, when universities do not have creative outlets that are congruent with their native cultures.

As a form of institutional obligation, students' satisfaction with academic services and facilities provided by the universities parallels their persistence in completing degrees. These services help to overcome any hardship that may challenge the student academically (or as seen, socially). Therefore, better quality of academic services guarantees better academically-skilled students as well as achieving greater retention rates.

Finally, students expressed their financial obligation and needs. They asserted how these financial aids contribute to two important factors that ensured their persistence and therefore, the attainment of their degree. First, this support affects the student psychologically. Addressing their concern about financial obligations (tuition, insurance and so on...) alleviates their stress and allows them more fully to concentrate on their studies. When the student is not burdened by financial obligations, his emotion and psychology will improve and this will be reflected in his academic performance, which cascades into a higher likelihood of persistence/retention at the university. However, there is a small gap needed to be filled in order to achieve financial solvency. The participants discussed their struggle with some academic obligation (e.g. expensive books, course materials, and the like). As a result, the financial supporter should consider students' needs and obligations as they pertain to their expenses and lifestyle differing based on states. In other words, students who live in small cities might not expend a lot of money like those who reside in larger cities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The small sample size induced some generalization in the study. In addition, this study included only Saudi students studying in the city of Milwaukee, while there are a huge number of Saudis studying in the other states. According to Wisz et al. (2008), with low sample size, it may not be possible to reach robust prediction. Moreover, the study included only students who have a scholarship from the (King Abdullah Program), while the students who pay their own tuition and expenses were excluded.

Since the number of female Saudi students (senior standing) in Milwaukee were limited, the researcher found difficulty with locating volunteers concerning these interviews. As a result, there were just two female students from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the other two were from Cardinal Strich University and Milwaukee School of engineering. Having more than three female students for each university may enhance the result to see if the interviewees' responses differ based on gender.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Since the sample size was small, including only Saudi students who study in Milwaukee, the results of the study cannot be generalized in any statistically meaningful fashion. Saudi students in different American states have different experiences concerning their colleges. For example, lifestyle, and expenses, weather and the like could differ based on the location. Midwest states have different weather from Eastern states. Therefore, student's persistence on the East Coast might be more positive than those who live in the Midwest. As a result, further

research is needed in identifying the factors contributing to Saudi student retention in American colleges when considering the different states. The sample size must be increased to ensure the validity of the survey's findings.

Another recommendation is to conduct interviews with university administrators, students' sponsors or stake-holders to gather their opinions and triangulate them with students' responses. Hearing from different sides will develop accurate results about why students leave or complete colleges. While the students may know why they leave school, the administrators may have more experience about the universities policies and what should be done to increase retention rate.

Further study can also include students who do not have scholarships from the government, those whom pay tuition and living expenses of their own accord. Comparing the students who have a scholarship with those who do not, will provide a better understanding into how the financial aspect affects students in completing their degree.

Finally, since this study only focused on students who are close to finish their bachelor's degree, it will be better to interview Saudi students who dropped out from American universities before completing their degree. This will provide additional information about the obstacles that hinder these students from completing their degree. Moreover, the researcher can compare between these two samples (retained and non-retained students).

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study indicated that efforts to improve the retention and success of Saudi students studying abroad requires substantial and thorough commitment on the part of both state-side and Saudi-side institutions and governments. Quality of received academic services, as well as faculty interaction with students, affects their persistence to complete their bachelor's degree. Saudi students comprise a small percentage of the total college population, and as a result, many of them find it difficult to interact with people who are ethnically and culturally different.

Universities' policies should provide programs that improve staff attitudes, and relationships with students, which in turn, minimize the social and academic gulf between them, and enable students to feel valued and sufficiently confident to seek guidance when they require it. Moreover, cultural diversity should be taken into account in the academic environment by providing collaborative or socially-orientated teaching and learning modules which promotes social relations between students through academic activities. Universities should address the obstacles that international students face with their education and financial obligations, and provide assistance for these problems, not out of respect for foreigners, but out of respect for their potential for greatness.

For Saudi government, having the Saudi government takes care of the financial pressures behind-the-scenes, increases the probability of retention because it makes a collegiate education more affordable (and more enjoyable, as the student will have more money for discretionary spending). The government should also take into account that living expenses and stipends should be based on how the states are expensive. Moreover, since these

students come from different educational system, the scholarship sponsor should help these students to look to places that have suitable academic environments where they can feel more adjusted. To bridge the gap for the different educational system, these students should be given “pre-courses preparation” before they attend the American universities in which they can attain background knowledge about courses taught in the host country.

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## **APPENDIX A:**

### **Survey Instrument**

Dear senior student,

My name is Abdulaziz Salem Aldossari, a Ph.D. student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting. This study examines the extent to which various factors assist Saudi students with the completion of their Bachelor's degrees, as well as isolating the factors which impede their graduation from American universities.

By completing and returning this questionnaire you are indicating your consent to take part in this research study. On the following pages you will find a short survey for you to complete. I will be the sole person reviewing your survey responses. While the results of the study will be published, neither your name, nor the name of the school and/or district, will appear in the article. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer. Completing the questionnaire is entirely voluntary. Not participating (not returning the questionnaire) will not affect your ability to receive continuing care at your university and you are not giving up any of your individual rights. If you have questions about this research, contact Abdulaziz Aldossari at [aldossa6@uwm.edu](mailto:aldossa6@uwm.edu)

### **Demographic Questions**

1- Name:.....

2- Gender: ☐ Male      ☐ Female

3- Nationality: ☐ Saudi Arabian      ☐ Other

4- Marital Status

☐ Single, Never Married

☐ Married

☐ Divorced

☐ Widowed

5- How many children do you have? (Specify).....

6- Your age is between: (check one)

☐ 16 to 20    ☐ 21 to 25    ☐ 26 to 30    ☐ 31 to 35

☐ more than 36

7- What is the Monthly income of your family (parents)?

☐ Less than \$2000

☐ \$2000-\$4000

☐ \$4001-\$8000

☐ Higher than \$8000

8- which university you attend?

☐ University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

☐ Milwaukee School of Engineering.

☐ Cardinal Strich University.

9- What is your level in the university?

☐ Freshmen.

☐ Sophomore.

☐ Junior.

☐ Senior

10- What is Your major?

☐ Engineering    ☐ Business    ☐ Humanity    ☐ Medicine    ☐ Computer sciences

☐ Other

11- What is the highest level of education your father completed?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than High School             | <input type="checkbox"/> High School/GED                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some College                      | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-Year College Degree (Associates) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-Year College Degree (Bachelors) | <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Degree.                   |

12- Does your father work? (Specify).....

13- What is the highest level of education your mother completed?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than High School             | <input type="checkbox"/> High School/GED                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some College                      | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-Year College Degree (Associates)         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-Year College Degree (Bachelors) | <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Degree (master, Doctorate, etc.). |

14- Does your mother work? (Specify).....

15- Do you work as a part time student in the campus? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how many hours do you work?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10 hours or less/week | <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 hours/week         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 21-30 hours/week      | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 30 hours/week. |

16- While a student at your current university, did you have to work in your previous years?

- ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, how many hours per week.....

17- Did the orientation provided by the ministry of higher education help you to adjust better in the United States?

- ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes or no, please specify why or how?.....

### Directions for the Next Section

Below are the factors believed to have positively contributed to the completion of Bachelor's degrees for many undergraduate Saudi students. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements regarding the reason(s) for completing your degree at the college you are attending.

You may check (X) in the scale of your choice.

#### **Rating Scale**

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree
6. No Response

#### **Personal Questions:**

18- To what degree do you agree that these factors affect the completion of your Bachelor's degree?

Personal Variables						
Factor	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response
I have an ambition to gain a bachelor degree						
I want to get better job						
I want to improve my skills						

Continued...						
Factor	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response
I will be proud of completing the degree						
I have a high GPA						
My level of English is high enough to complete my school work						

Psychological Variables						
Factor	Strongly disagree.	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response
I have been supported by peers						
I do not have difficulty making friends with Americans outside the university						
I have a high level of self-efficacy						
I have a high level of self-esteem						

**Academic Questions:**

Faculty variables						
Factor	Strongly disagree.	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response
I have good communication with faculty						
I like knowledge provided by the professors						
I am satisfied with advisor flexibility						
I interact with the professor in the class						
My advisor considers my absence from classes						
My professor requires too many assignments						

Engagement Variables						
Factor	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response
I have good communication with students in the class						
I interact with my classmates						
I communicate with my classmates outside the campus						
My classmates help me with any difficulty in the classes						
I engage with American students						
I engage with Saudi students						

University variables						
Factor	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response
I am satisfied with the services provided by the writing center						
I like the counselor helps in solving my problems						
I like campus community						
I like the university cultural activities						
I like the university athletic activities						
I like university recreation activities like billiards, table tennis, etc						
My academic skills match university course requirements						

**Financial Questions:**

Financial variables						
Factor	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response
My scholarship covers all my tuition expenses						
My scholarship covers all my book and class materials						
My scholarship allotment covers all my rent.						
My scholarship allotment covers all my food expenses						
My scholarship allotment covers all my transportation and other expenses						
My scholarship allotment covers my child care expenses						

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Interview Protocol**

**Study Title:** Analysis of Factors Contributing to College Retention of Saudi Students Studying in the U.S.

**Protocol:** One-on-One Interview.

#### **Interview Guide:**

##### **Before the Interview:**

The interviewer should look to a specific place where the interviews be conducted. The location should be quiet and the interviewer should have a spare place in case of noise. He should make sure that all participants know the location. He should also make sure to come early in the location, and inform the participant to come at least 5 minutes before the interview is conducted. The interviewer should bring his equipment and interview stuff (e.g. papers, pens), and he should know how to use them.

##### **Goal of One-on One Interview:**

One-one one interview makes the participant more comfortable in which direct communication or exchange between two people exists. This kind of interview provide better information about the experiences especially that contain personal information. The interviews will contribute to identify the factors that lead students to persist in the university and what should be done to meet the need for retention factors.

The role of the interviewer will be to ask questions as listed in the protocol as well as adding some probing questions that may arise in the interview. The interviewer role will be more likely to listen, write, and enhance the discussion to get more details. He should be sure all questions are covered.

##### **Introduction and Consent:**

Identify yourself by your name, the name of your university and the title of your study. Briefly give the subjects some background information about why this study is being conducted. This can include information about what is already known and what you hope to learn. Explain that the purpose of the interview is to get a deeper understanding on college retention and

persistence through interviewees' experiences, circumstances, and events that may lead to enhance college retention.

The interviewees should be informed that they will be asked questions pertaining their educational experiences that support or do not support college completion. Be sure to tell them "there are no wrong or right answers." Therefore, detailed information will enhance the study and fulfill the goal the investigator seeks. Since the interviewer may repeat some question that may or may not have the same answer, so please be patient to receive any kind of these questions.

### **Informed Consent:**

After passing the consent form, the interviewer should read that again "Your participation in this interview session is completely voluntary. You are free to stop your participation at any time. The interview session is estimated to take 40 to 50 minute, do you wish to continue and participate in the interview session today? The purpose of repeating is because some interviewees do not read everything. Then, obtain signed forms and provide a copy to the participants.

### **Permission to Audiotape:**

To facilitate note-taking, the interviewer is extremely recommended to audio tape the conversations. Hence, the participant should sign the form for audiotaping. For interviewees' information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Otherwise, if the participant does not accept to be audiotaped, the interviewer should be ready to take notes from participants' responses. Make sure to turn ON and OFF the recorder.

## **Interview Question**

### **Personal Questions:**

- 1- First, could you please give me more information about you and your college (e.g. name, age, major, institution, time you started the college, GPA, socioeconomic class)?
- 2- What does it mean for you to have a Bachelor degree?
- 3- Looking at your university experience, do you see yourself as a successful student?
  - Could you explain what makes you successful or not successful?
- 4- Why did decide to begin your postsecondary education at the United States?

- Have you ever left a university before? If yes, why?
  - Once in the U.S., have you dropped out from one university and then transferred to this one? If yes, why?
- 5- What is the influence did your family make to complete your education?
- 6- How do you the orientation provided by the ministry of higher education before you came here?

Academic Questions:

- 1- Describe how you spend your time at this college?
- 2- As a student in the university, how does the university community make you feel and why?
- 3- How do you see the services and facilities provided by the university and how can that affect your persistence in the school?
- Did you ever have a desire to leave the university because of the services provided (how)?
- 4- Have you encountered difficulties/problems while enrolled at this university?
- If so, how did you overcome them?
  - Did the problem make you think to drop your classes?
- 5- What were your first experiences like at the university with respect to your classes?
- 6- What do you think about the courses that you have taken?
- Have they been easy or difficult? Why?
- 7- What kind of grades have you received at the university?
- Have low grades, average grades, or high grades affected your desire to continue or drop-out from the university? Why?
- 8- What have been your experiences like about interacting with faculty, administrators, and other staff members from the university?
- Have some of these interactions been supportive or detrimental for your continuation in the university?

- 9- What have been your experiences about interacting with other students in your classes or at the university?
- Have they been positive, natural, or negative? Please explain?
- 10- What type of campus activities or facilities have been supportive or detrimental for your continuation at the university?

Financial Issue Questions:

- 1- How do you pay your college tuition?
- Do your parents support you financially and what does that support cover?
  - Does the scholarship support all tuition? If no, why? (e.g. online course)
- 2- How do you see the financial support provided from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM)? (E.g. compensations, health insurance, and monthly stipends).
- Has this affected you in your desire to continue in the school?
- 3- What are the financial problems that may affect you or other Saudi students' probabilities of completing a college degree while in the U.S.?
- 4- How have you been able to overcome the financial problems you have faced?
- Who usually supports you with this problem?

Warp-up:

Is there anything else you think is important for us to know regarding Saudi student seeking Bachelor degree and college retention in the United States that was not covered today?

Conclusion:

Thank the interviewees for their participation. Ask them if they allow you to call them back in case of confusing or unclear points that need to be clarified.

## APPENDIX C:

### Codebook and Dictionary

#### Coding Categories and Symbols:

Symbol	Definition
Number	Indicates to the grandparents codes
-	Indicates to parents codes
#	Indicates to young codes.
*	Indicates to child codes.

#### Coding Book:

- 1- Demographic information
  - Education
  - Personal information
- 2- Difference between Studying in Saudi Arabia and the U.S.
  - Perception of Academic services.
  - Perception of Educational environment.
  - Perception of Faculty.
- 3- Education Experience in the U.S.
  - Student's feeling
  - Spending time
- 4- Hardships Students Face
  - Cultural conflict
  - Expensive books
  - Hardship with courses
  - Language
  - Living and housing issues
  - Low achievement and GPA
  - Stipends and monthly payment.
  - University system
  - Weather conditions
  - Loan and social security numbers
  - Online courses and sponsor
  - Professor experience and teaching
  - Working outside the university
  - Responsibilities

#### 5- Retention Factor

- Perception of Academic services and factors
  - # Perception of Activities
  - # Exams and challenging the students
  - # Perception of Faculty and advisors
  - # Importance of the academic factor)
  - # Perception of Interaction
    - \*Between student and faculty
    - \* Within students.
  - # Internet and lab services
  - # Perception of Office hours
  - # Perception of teaching Method and Experience.
  - # Perception of tutoring and other serving programs.
  - #University Community
    - Cooperation
- Environmental and Peer factor
- Financial factor
  - # Sponsor obligation
- Personal factor
  - # Better future
  - # Better job opportunity
  - # making goal
  - # Managing time
  - # Social positionality
  - # Study plan
- Psychological factors

#### 6- Value of Education

#### 7- Ways to Solve the Problems

- Overcoming the academic problems
- Overcoming the Psychological problems
- Overcoming the financial problems.

#### 8- Decision to study abroad

- Faculty and academic reason (quality of education)
- Family and environmental causes
- parental factors

Code Definitions and Examples:

Code	Definition	Example
1- Demographic information	Relating to the person's characteristics and information	Big node
- Education	The level of education and specialization that the person attend including schools he attended	<i>"study I study material engineering in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee."</i>
- Personal information	Information of the person that belongs to his name, age, family, ...etc	<i>"I like stating with the name of the God (Allah). (um) firstly, my name is Ibrahim Mohammad Al Gababna. (um) first question! The Age is 23 years-old"</i>
2- Difference between Studying in Saudi Arabia and the U.S.	How education and life in Saudi Arabia differ from that in the United States in terms of student obligation, responsibility, ...etc	<i>"Um the difference between education in Saudi Arabia and in the United States, surely from in the case of economic situation being in America or being in Saudi, of course there is a remarkable huge difference, so here (in the United States) you spend money and you should be responsible about the expenses. In Saudi Arabia, you may not be responsible on you food, drink, but here you are responsible in everything everything, like expenses, food, drink, washing clothes, all thing belong to you, you must fully depend on yourself, from small thing to the large thing. All these factors that may lead some students to have heavy in their study time."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Perceptions Academic services.	The quality of academic serviced provided in Saudi's universities.	<i>"Um as I have heard comparing this to Saudi Arabia. There is nothing called office hour for the doctors, office hours here I mean you can go to the professor, discuss with him,"</i>
- Perception of Educational environment.	How the environment and people surrounding the student affect negatively the student education.	<i>"um this thing I see um of course I have seen some universities in Saudi Arabia but not in the time of classes, so I do not know how they been there, so I cannot add detailed information what is the difference between here and there. But basically here I see um my feeling as a student, particularly in foreign universities and being surrounded by people who have the same goal, and studying. In other words, if I were in Saudi, I will be surrounded by cousins, employees with salaries, and that will affect me psychotically um different from here. When all come with one goal, study, so (um) that is considered a motive for for, very helpful to study, especially university campus and being in the library especially that is the large um one of the places I prefer to study in. generally, in the United States, even when you go to Cafes, Star bucks and other cafes, you can see people opening their book and read.</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Faculty.	How faculty treat and help student in Saudi's Universities, in which the student cannot get his right.	<i>"this point may be different form Saudi Arabia in which you do not have sometimes the right to discuss with the professor, and some professors reject to discuss him about your papers, but here you have the right and you can revise even your final exam"</i>
3- Education Experience in the U.S.	How student experience education in the United States and his satisfaction	Big node
- Student's feeling	Student's feeling about university in general and what he sees.	<i>"something make me tired, I do not like it. Educationally, I hate society of study, but I persist because I want to reach my goal, so I am forced to engage into it. Um in terms of society, there is a person who is cooperating and one who is not, there is a successful person in the university campus and there is who fail, so many things in the university. So I cannot customize a specific point for society."</i>
- Spending time	the time the student spends in the university time and break including what he does after finishing the classes	<i>"um my time in the university is spent to classes, um I finish my classes in um, either I do my assignments, something required from me to finish, um it is should be there is time for rest, either for sport, or (um) going out to have some fun."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
4- Hardships Students Face	Factors that affect students and lead him to leave the school or at least affect him negatively in his education	Big node
- Cultural Barrier	The cultural conflict between Saudi culture and the dominant culture in the United States specifically with activities	<i>"I Have never done some activities with students outside the university. Because there ways are different from mine, the culture is different, many things they go to in the weekend and I cannot because I am Muslim as Bars, I do not like to go to them because I am Muslim, many things I do not go with them, except inside the university, so my interaction with them just in the class."</i>
- Expensive books	The difficulty in buying books.	<i>"we just face difficulties sometimes in the beginning of the semester to buy the books. These are the difficulties as students we face because the books cost us a lot, I mean approximately I spend like half of my monthly salary on books in the beginning of the semester. So I face problems that force me to call my family, I talk personally, others may be financially worse which he cannot even buy book with the salary and may take them online or by any way."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Hardship with courses	How provided courses do not fit student ability, interest, skills, ...	<i>"it is completely different. There is different, I mean um there is one of the courses, um not one course but most courses I mean um I notice the difference between Saudi student and American that they already have background about the course from the high school whereas we did not take that in the high school. There are for instances a course that I am taking this semester which are computer science, they have background they took it from the high school, but we did not take it. Um there is a course that belong to industrial engineering called AutoCAD which is drawing with computer and drawing sketch, they have background on them they studies that in the high school, whereas we do not know any thin about these things"</i>
- Language	Language barrier that decreases students understanding of some concepts, courses...	<i>"mmm as a student, as they say not English speaker, is the language, we face it because most umm there is between international students and one whose native language is English. The student with native tongue will understand all words said by the professor, while the international student will need translator, will need more interpretation"</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Living and housing issues	The circumstances students face when come to study here for example living issues, roommates, making friends...	<i>"When I first came here I did not know people or in the first three months, I met a few people in the Dorm, so it is different, you got upset, and the university Dorm where I live in for six months, I faced (umm) I spent time that I do not hope to come back. I stayed in a Dorm with 20 student from various countries, and there was people who are zero in the cleaning. I could not sleep for many days, I could not sleep for many days; and there was someone who um smoke weed. In the weekend he smokes weed because there is no American students, so the smell itself affect and spread in the area. When I sit in my room, I could smell and I could not sleep in it. My achievement went down in the first and second quarter and I was almost to be expelled from the university because of these things. Thanks to the God I moved to an apartment, my pace where I can keep my private stuff, and I made friend with many people and I could not control, I overcame all of them. Um concerning umm I did not work hard in the first, but thanks to the God my GPA is around 3 and in the beginning my GPA was around 1, just to clarify that more."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Low achievement and GPA	Students' performance in the school and the grades he/she receives and how that affect him/her negatively and how it may lead to dropout	<i>"Yes yes. It gave a feeling to umm first the university will expel me, feeling of unemployment. Graduating with low GPA 1.8 meaning which is for me equal to someone with no degree. It is different from one whose GPA is above 3 above 2.5 and above, he may face some difficulties in the courses that decrease his GPA, but the factors of Low GPA, expelling from the university, and unemployment are the motives that pushed me to work hard in the remaining semesters."</i>
- Stipends and monthly payment.	The salaries provided from the sponsor to the students as a financial support to get book, clothes, and other living obligations.	<i>"I have difficulties with low stipend that the stipend um or the money we take is less and we live from it. Um we cannot rent and we must depends on another financial guarantees from my father or cousin in Saudi Arabia to ensure you.um and some apartment owners reject rent some people whose salaries rate bellow level of poor salaries. It is (pause) um sufficient and at the same time not sufficient, I mean since we get from this stipend our daily needs, books, um we pass through some stress in addition to bills and something like that. But since the tuition is paid I see thanks to the God that I mean you can live with this stipend, you can adapt."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- University system	The system of university whether quarters or semesters.	<i>"um when I started the university, I did not do well in the first quarter. That was first because the system is different, I was familiar with semesters and I transferred to quarters. My achievement in the university decreased."</i>
- Weather conditions	The weather condition in the city where the student study in and how that affect its persistence and achievement in the school	<i>"ummm another point that I face in the United States personally is the weather. The weather could be a factor of the low achievement of the student"</i>
- Loan and social security numbers	The financial support provided from the government or the university	<i>"um I do not think that there are loans, they may provide loans when you have account in a specific bank for long time, they may give you, but when you are a student without um without social security number, it is difficult to take a loan. Um, this social is our problem that even in renting houses, we pay the double for the deposit because we do not have social security number. Um in most things that we have in our daily live whether in drink, rent, even with cell phone companies, if you do not social security number, every thing will be doubled, and some people do not rent you and some companies do not accept that."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Online courses and sponsor	The rejection of taking online courses and limited credits allowing students to take online courses or hybrid	<i>"we do not face problem from university, we face problem from the scholarship sponsor more that does not allow some courses um some course be (pause) um the instructions of class I mean online classes and the sponsor (cultural mission) refuse that class, and sometimes the class is not fully online, you know that the problem of course that hybrid or not hybrid. Um sometimes the class's description um has um include some information that indicate to online structures, based on that the sponsor prohibits that. This one of the things could make me late academically, harm me academically, but Thanks to the God I did not face another problem with them so far."</i>
- Professor experience and teaching	The professor qualification in providing the instructions to be understood as well as his treatment	<i>"Concerning the professor, he was not that much of help because he was a visitor and he already an employee and he came just as a substitute till the fined another instructor for the course, um he did not provide helpful assistance, un he tried but may be since we did not have background,"</i>
- Working outside the university	Not allowing students to work in any job outside the university.	<i>"it will be limited and outside the university not allowed for students to have jobs because the visa is F1, so you should only study."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Responsibilities	Obligations and responsibility student face when he comes to study in the United States that he probably did not do in his own country	<i>"But here you are responsible in everything everything, like expenses, food, drink, washing clothes, all thing belong to you, you must fully depend on yourself, from small thing to the large thing. All these factors that may lead some students to have heavy in their study time, and from the most reason that make the students may affect their study, their psychological factors. Being you arrange, clean, cooking, washing your clothes, the smallest thing you do them by yourself."</i>
5- Retention Factor	Factors contribute to retain the student from leaving the school before gaining the degree	Big code
- Perception of Academic services and factors	The services provided by the university that help students to solve his academic problems as well as university facilities	<i>"Yes any facility, including consoling program, orientation, anything, even I mean (pause) any service you see in the university. How you see it? Do you see deficiency, I would like you please tell me about that in details?"</i>
# Perception of Activities	Programs outside the curriculum provided by the university for example, trips, sports ...	<i>"in the university I guess that there are more than 60 organization groups (and groups um under every college and major, there is organization, they do projects, they hold weekly and monthly meetings, they offer job opportunities."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
# Exams and challenging the students	Creating difficult exams that include challenging information and usually not given information in the instruction.	<i>"Um for example, if I take a course and the professor said "you have to work hard to pass the course," will you focus on this course? I will focus on it and the other course will be focused less. And when the care is low, the grade will go down. So low achievement in other courses and failure in this course and that because of the professor treatment. Opposite to the professor who is easy with the student and gives exam about what he explained in the course, that make the student to focus on all courses with the same level."</i>
# Perception of Faculty and advisors	The role of faculty and advisor assistance in student retention and dropout	<i>"um I think they decided but I do not know about details, but the advisors contacted the sponsor and the ended the problem and I think they did not require a separate financial guarantee for the class which the online course because this class is for major and they are required to take it."</i>
# Importance of the academic skill factor	How students with proficient academic skill are more able than others in which he spends less time and efforts.	<i>"positively if sometimes I spend many times during study time thinking about an idea and takes many hours from me, instead of spending time um I save the three hours for example that I try to find the idea but um when it comes in for instance in half hours with explanation and understand it and I can benefit from it."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
# Perception of Interaction	The communication between the professor and the student or within students each other.	Example down
*Between student and faculty	The interaction between student and his professor whether in class or outside the class	<i>"um as an interaction, most professors start interaction with the student when they see how the student is interested for that. I have faced many issues, um office hour, I should benefit from it and go to the professor, even if I have a question that I understand it I tell him. That is regarding the interaction between the student and the teacher. I utilize from office hour, I use email, that I ask him about problems; even if I benefited in this time, in the end of the semester concerning ummm each university has a scale for grading which is A,B,C,.. when you got between A and B the professor might increase your grade because this student is diligent and he deserves more than his original grade, that happened to me personally, I went to the professor and he also said I increased your grade because ummm the questions that you usually ask and your coming to the office hour, this point. According to student with student, between each other,"</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
* Within students	The interaction between the student and his/her classmates	<i>"Communication as students that could be in project project, thing usually be working as groups and um we should work together. So the communication with student usually is excellent."</i>
# Internet and lab services	The services the help student to apply what he study or search more about his course as well as the internet services that student need with their emails and electronic requirement	<i>"The university, our university is distinctive with something that increase the student's grasp which are labs. These labs gave the university high rank, I mean I take most mechanical courses include labs, except one or two courses and most courses offered in the university are with labs. Labs are applying what I study, I mean I can see it in reality. These as educationally is very important in the university."</i>
# perception of Office hours	Time scheduled by the instructor in order to meet students who need something in his office.	<i>"Mandating professors for specific office hours to receive students that um all these I used them, and I feel satisfied with. These things helped me a lot."</i>
# Perception of Teaching Method and Experience.	The ways, materials, and the approach that the instructor uses in the class	<i>"But now I take the course and I can see that in my life like how to operate the car's engine, as many examples. An example, how the airplane flies, I can notice that know do you know why? Why the sport car is different from the regular car, which is shorter and has a specific shape. we can notice that when you attend the university you will start to notice many things."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
# Perception of tutoring and other serving programs.	A programs that help student with needs for example writing center tutoring...	<i>"we have tutoring, um in the case of facing some difficulty, the university is offering special students with high ability they can help you with you homework, explain the homework, um help you for exams, um you can register with a student they call him um I think success center, that you can sign like a contract with someone easily through the website, Um you register, and he will be within the whole semester during times fit to both. You can meet him one or two times a week and revise revise fully the curriculum or the course."</i>
# perception of University Community	The community inside the campus in which student can or cannot engage other.	<i>"something make me tired, I do not like it. Educationally, I hate society of study, but I persist because I want to reach my goal, so I am forced to engage into it. Um in terms of society, there is a person who is cooperating and one who is not, there is a successful person in the university campus and there is who fail, so many things in the university. So I cannot customize a specific point for society."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooperation</li> </ul>	Cooperation and engagement inside university campus	<i>"All most people in the university coming to one goal either for help people or being helped. Either he benefits from others or providing help to others. That the largest point may be."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Environmental and Peer factor	How peers outside the university help each other	<i>"Cooperation is very important. Cooperation helps you with many things. For example, I took a course, a course with F, which is composite material, the course is not easy. There was a cooperation between me and Faisal."</i>
- Financial factor	Financial issues and support that affect student persistence in United States universities.	<i>"of course that affected me that I benefited a lot, I have become I mean um I do not have stress that I do not think about the course and how I pay for the university, um I was almost to be without payment and was difficult for me that in the beginning of my admission in the university, the sponsor rejected me to study in the university here and I was compelled to pay my tuition from my pocket, and even the thinking in this problem and how I make money for tuition were um a big concern because the amount is not easy to pay, can you imagine if I pay these tuitions for all semesters for the degree and I work and study at the same times, um these are tiring"</i>
# sponsor obligation	The guardian that provides support for students who are studying in the U.S.	<i>"the government provides all tuitions, um with health insurance, and monthly stipends that 12 credits or more that the government particularly cultural mission pays the tuition."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Personal factor	Personal or individual factors that affect student retention.	Big node
# Better future	The student aspiration in the future and the reason that leads him to persist which is better future.	<i>"that means a lot for me, either I got many opportunities before I came to America to complete my Bachelor degree, I had many businesses and I signed contract (um) with people I means (um) special businesses, and I preferred to complete my study, then I can started those businesses offered. (um) for one reason, earning a degree, that will provide (um) benefit you in the future."</i>
#Better job opportunity	Completing the bachelor degree to get better job with high characteristics.	<i>"I can't hide that in employment, in employment it is different concerning that salaries and comfort because the person in this time this degree is not for me, I build generation, I teach, I teach people. If I do not have sufficient knowledge and information, how I teach them and how they live, (pause) in these days."</i>
# making goal	Having a specific goal make the student persistent to reach his goal	<i>"Success (pause) is having a goal and make that and now in this time my success is attaining the Bachelor degree. When I got the bachelor degree that means I achieve the first goal I the life, my first success."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
# Managing time	Organizing time contribute to student success and retention	<i>"But most guys since their times is spent, they cannot make manage for his time. This large thing may be reason for the failure the failure of some students here."</i>
# Social positionality	Persistence to gain the bachelor degree in order to increase social status	<i>"Being with a degree, has a social value, for your children, for yourself, for your culture; and how you treat people, will be! Person with Bachelor degree will be different from one with high school education. Even though you are rich, your degree will benefit you. So (um) I see the degree is more important than money, regardless the job, regardless everything, it has cultural, social and educational value in the future."</i>
# Study plan	Make an organizing schedule for work ensure success and retention.	<i>"I do not face so far any problem with the university thanks to the God. I am perfectly keeping my study plan, um I take course, and that is good with me, so far um no problem."</i>
- Psychological factors	Psychological factors that affect student retention and emotions	<i>"There are some people the psychological factors control them. Of course usually emotional things control person more than other things. I mean I notice even psychologically, I when (Um) I use my as controller, usually I get depressed. But when I use my mind and thinking critically, I usually succeed."</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
6- Value of Education	The reason that pushed student to complete his education generally	<i>"You will see high quality of technology in educated society, um the way of treatment, in time, we go back, can I talk with slang language."</i>
7- Ways to Solve the Problems	How students face some problem that could affect their persistence.	<i>"What is the reason of the low achievement, try to study that reason as it happened to me like weather and something like that, and like university Dorm. I moved to apartment close to the university in order to decrease the long time to get the university. I left all these things and I provide for myself a different environment in order to overcome these all these reasons."</i>
- Overcoming the academic problems	Face and beat some academic problem that might affect retention	<i>"In that time we did not honestly go to the professor, we went to Saudi Students who already finished this course before and we referred to the book, we referred to YouTube um we passed that um that AutoCAD course um till the end of the semester I ended it with pass grade which is C, but um in the end of the semester I really understand and recognized the course. I agree this understanding came late, but I can say that I am able to use this program and um I can work um within its domain,"</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Overcoming the Psychological problems	Overcome psychological factors to persist in the university.	<i>"I notice even psychologically, when I use my as controller, usually I get depressed. But when I use my mind and thinking critically, I usually succeed. In these time how you pass, patience and persistence, in which you try psychological ways prepare yourself, you can say lie to yourself, create something even if it does exist, just to pass the bad level you have. For instances, if there is a course that I do not understand, I should give myself a hope that I am able to do that thing. That things being I convince myself and my mind that I've ability to do that, I sometimes pass it and succeed. Not sometimes, but mostly, I pass these things. The issue is how you convince yourself, the psychological factors are what control your success and failure. When you convince yourself that you are not able, you will not do anything; and if you convince yourself that will be as experiment and you will pass it, you will succeed."</i>
- Overcoming the financial problems.	Managing some financial issues to avoid any financial problem affect persistence.	<i>"Here if you do not have a good organization for your money, you will be in (um) trouble, you will have debt may be to the last month. (um) this may be the difference between studding here and studying there,"</i>

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
8- Decision to study abroad	The reasons and factors that motivated the student to leave Saudi Arabia and study in the U.S.	"I started to think to come to the United States and I registered with my paper to come to the United States, but the circumstances did not allow, the refused to give the vise and I changed then to Canada."
- Faculty and academic reason (quality of education)	How the quality of education and faculty attract the student to study in the United States.	"There were reason that led me to transfer from the university in Canada to the University in America. There was a professor who are from Arab roots and I faced, even if he is Arab, Arab racism, that he does not like Saudi students. One of that experience I have faced with his was that in the class, electric course, in the beginning of the class he said that "for those who did not take this course, they can take it in the summer because the course will be offered in the summer and this class is full with the students" and during the class time one Canadian student raised his hand and said I will take this course in the summer. He to the student I do not recommend you to take the course (pause) in the summer. The student said why. The teachers said I teach the course generally in Arabic language in the summer, for this course. And " I am" (pause) this word he said you know Saudis are weak in the achievement

Continued...		
Code	Definition	Example
- Family and environmental causes	The role of family education and student's environment in motivating the student to study and complete his degree in the U.S. for example cousins, friends, siblings, and people who are surrounding the student	"Um regarding to the society that I live in, Thanks to the God all of them are educated, and three of my brothers are graduated from the petroleum university, and four sisters are graduated from Science College in Dammam and um that motivated me a lot to complete my study, as society and umm all people surrounding me are educated as well, I mean in study study and society."
- parental factors	The parent's role and education level that make the student desire to study abroad.	<i>"my father (um) means finished intermediate school level, and from old generations, so ending intermediate school in that time, it was equal to university and college. After that he got 2 years diploma um being different from one of my friends his father is a professor, or engineer! Even my father is considered educated based on the time, but the difference of positionality a name in jobs, make a social difference, (um) in education, ok. Thanks to the God, my father traveled and see other society and complete a 2 years diploma, we can say that is equal to higher education in that time."</i>

**APPENDIX D:**

**Student Consent**

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MILWAUKEE**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**STUDENT CONSENT**

THE STUDY IS NOT EXEMPT: **THIS CONSENT FORM HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE IRB FOR A ONE YEAR PERIOD]**

**1. General Information**

**Study title:**

Factors Contributing to College Retention of Undergraduate Saudi Students Studying in the United States

**Person in Charge of Study (Principal Investigator):**

My name is Abdulaziz Aldossari. I am a PhD student in the urban education Program at UWM. The advisor of this study will be Prof. Javier Tapia, Associate Professor in Educational Policy Department at UWM.

This project is being sponsored by N/A

**2. Study Description**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to.

**Study description:**

The purpose of this case study is to understand the factors contributing to college retention for undergraduate Saudi students studying in the United States. For the purposes of this study, retention is defined as the school's ability to keep a student from enrollment to graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005),

The researcher will survey at least 30 Saudi students (senior standing) from three universities in the State of Wisconsin, particularly from the City of Milwaukee. The purpose of this survey is to identify patterns of factors that facilitate and/or hinder completion of a bachelor's degree. Then, the researcher

will conduct face-to-face interviews with a smaller sub-sample of 10 students from the survey sample in order to get additional details from the students' response

The study will be conducted in United States. The interview session will range from 40 to 50 minutes for each. The interviews may take 7 days to be completed. These interviews will be scheduled around the convenience of the interviewees. For the survey, the participant will be given 20 days to send their responses then, the investigator will send a reminder for those who did not participate to complete the survey within one week.

### **3. Study Procedures**

#### **What will I be asked to do if I participate in the study?**

If you agree to participate, you and other members will be asked to fill out this form. Ten students will be selected to be interviewed as case study. You will take part in survey and interview that will help us to learn the factors contributing to college retention of Saudi students studying in the U.S. Regarding the survey, it will not take more than 10 minutes to be completed. These interviewees will not take more than one hour to be finished. With your permission, we will record your voice during the activities with a tape recorder. The recording will be done to make sure we accurately record your views. If you do not want your voice recorded, please let the researchers know and we will write down your responses on paper instead.

### **4. Risks and Minimizing Risks**

#### **What risks will I face by participating in this study?**

The potential risks for participating in this study are minimal or no

You may feel not comfortable in asking some questions talking about your experiences and your history. However, the investigator can skip that. If you are asked a question you do not want to answer, you do not have to answer that question.

### **5. Benefits**

#### **Will I receive any benefit from my participation in this study?**

There are no benefits to you other than to further research

## 6. Study Costs and Compensation

### **Will I be charged anything for participating in this study?**

You will not be responsible for any cost of taking part in this research study, and this interview is voluntary.

### **Are subjects paid or given anything for being in the study?**

Nothing given or paid for the participants.

## 7. Confidentiality

### **What happens to the information collected?**

All information collected about you during this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. We may decide to present what we find to others, or publish our results in scientific journals or at scientific conferences. Only the investigator and his faculty advisor will have access to the information. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records.

You will be identified on tape or on paper with a made-up name. Your name will not appear anywhere and no one will know about your answers except the researcher and the faculty advisor.

After the interview, the voice recordings of the activities will be typed word for word by the investigator. The recordings will be erased immediately after the researcher completes that. The transcripts of the recordings will be stored in a password-protected. The typing will be stored in locked room.

All of the information collected for this study will be destroyed when the study is complete

## 8. Alternatives

### **Are there alternatives to participating in the study?**

No

## 9. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

### What happens if I decide not to be in this study?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee or any university.

The investigator or the sponsor may stop your participation in this study if they feel it is necessary to do so.

If you decide to withdraw or if you are withdrawn from the study before it ends, we will use the information we collected up to that point.

## 10. Questions

### Who do I contact for questions about this study?

For more information about the study or the study procedures or treatments, or to withdraw from the study, contact:

Abdulaziz Salem Aldossari  
Education College, Department of Educational Policy  
University of Wisconsin  
4848 N Lydell Ave  
Milwaukee, WI 53217  
414-241-3914

### Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?

The Institutional Review Board may ask your name, but all complaints are kept in confidence.

Institutional Review Board  
Human Research Protection Program  
Department of University Safety and Assurances

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee  
P.O. Box 413  
Milwaukee, WI 53201  
(414) 229-3173

## 11. Signatures

### Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

*To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered, and that you are 18 years of age or older.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Subject/ Legally Authorized Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Research Subject's Consent to Audio/Video/Photo Recording:

It is okay to audiotape me while I am in this study and use my audiotaped data in the research.

Please initial: \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No

**Principal Investigator (or Designee)**

*I have given this research subject information on the study that is accurate and sufficient for the subject to fully understand the nature, risks and benefits of the study.*

---

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Study Role

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

Abdulaziz Salem Aldossari

Place of birth: East province, Saudi Arabia

### **Education**

B.A., King Faisal University, June 2008

Major: Mathematics

M.S., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, December 2013

Major: Cultural Foundations of Education

Dissertation Title: Factors Contributing to College Retention of Undergraduate Saudi Students Studying in the United States